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ACCENT

A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE

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R. V. CASSILL:

The Outer Island

"I've got all the testimony," the major said. "There won't be much for you to do, I should think. I've been over it all with everyone who'd know anything about it." It was the second time he had said this since the lighter had left the main island an hour ago. It concerned the business of their voyage across the channel, and also, as though by mutual accord, seemed accepted as the only matter of common interest to the major and the little Jewish captain from the Island Surgeon's office.

Actually, Captain Stern was too seasick and generally uncomfortable even to pay much attention to what the major was telling him. They were driving now straight against the waves coming in with the channel current. His right hand, tight on an upright of the rail around the pilot's deck, was stung by the jar of the waves as though someone were irregularly beating the rail with an iron club. Since the submarine net had been passed a mile or so back, he had watched steadily and with sick fascination the dark water which alternately rose to the gunwale beside him, then slid down and away with a hiss.

Everywhere on the waves and on the spray beaten upward by the prow of the boat the sunlight glittered and flashed points of light that hurt his eyes. He was obliged to pull his sun helmet down to a ridiculous angle over his eyes. Whenever the major spoke, he hastily smiled without separating his jaws and muttered back, "Yes, I see."

"I think that's the whole picture," the major said. "The IG has

The men raised their heads when the boat swung in and sat up drowsily when it bumped the pier and the two officers stepped out. None of them spoke, nor did the major speak to them. A thin boy in khakis without insignia walked down the beach to meet them. He saluted when he came up, his hand touching his cap once for each of them in a loose, polite way.

"Hello, sergeant," the major said. "You want to run and find the lieutenant for us?" To Stern he explained, as though caught in some error but still expecting Stern to be a good fellow and understand, "I guess he wasn't expecting us. Could even be in his sack. There's not much to do here, and I try not to give them as far as I'm concerned myself too damn much GI formalities."

Stern stood dazed, looking at the camp. He could still feel the roll of the channel, the strange hypnosis, which even in a short crossing, in these few miles, seemed to have taken entire possession of him. Out in the boat he had comforted himself with the notion that he'd quickly find a place to sit in the cool blue shade when they reached shore. But this beach at noon, flinging up a heat and light as sterile as the sand, and the little camp above it, denied the promise of ease which had seemed so definite from a distance out. On three sides of the clearing there were trees matted from ground to top with vines; so the whole space was like a green quarry pit open to the sun. The floor of the pit, an area grown with brush and irregular formations of banana trees, held the tents and two buildings. A few trunks of girdled trees pointed up into the glaring sky.

"Pretty sad place, huh?" the major asked, grinning. "Gets even better here in December. It's pleasant sometimes, though, when the sun gets down a little. Come on up to the mess hall and we'll get some lemonade anyway while the sergeant rounds up Lieutenant Singer."

The mess hall was a frame building, completely unshaded. The tarpaper on the roof and walls shone like the skins of the black men who had been on the pier.

One more structure stood in crude isolation on a mound of coral at the center of the clearing. It was a little wooden shack with a tent roof, so narrow that it looked from the front like a country privy. "Officers quarters," the major said.

"That's where . . ."

"Yeah. We'll look in there after a bit. Singer hasn't moved into it yet. I didn't want anything touched until I finished up my investiga-

tion. Had a guard on it until three days ago when I cleared it with the IG that it couldn't have been a murder. Then I figured I'd leave it for you to look at if you wanted to."

"I don't know if that was necessary," Stern said.

"I wanted to be thorough about it. Thought you'd like to look at his letters and all just the way we found them." As they sat down in the mess hall, he went on, "You won't find anything from the letters, though, unless you can read minds. I brought him some mail the last time I was out before he did it, and so I thought right away there might have been something in that. You know, some bad news. Nothing. Wait a minute, I know what you're going to ask about that — if he might not have got some bad news and thrown the letter away. Well, I happened to remember what I'd brought him, and when I checked up, he had those letters all there."

"I wasn't thinking of that," Stern said and smiled. "You're a better detective than I. That hadn't occurred to me. I can see you've covered everything pretty thoroughly."

"Ah. Well, I tried to . . ." The major made a self-deprecatory gesture, half a shrug.

"I don't suppose you need me in on this, really. To get what you wanted," Stern said.

"Oh," the major said, "you'll be able to point out probably a lot of things that we never even thought of."

While they were eating — some corned-beef hash that the cook had opened for them — Lieutenant Singer came in. He was a tall young man, dressed no more completely than the major and burned almost as dark a red. He sat across the mess table from them and leaned forward on his elbows. "Hi, major. Good trip?" To Stern he said derisively, not quite impolitely, "This isn't the kind of chow you get over at headquarters on the island is it, Captain?"

Stern said quickly, "We eat hash, too."

"Yeah? I was up there a while back for a steak dinner. Tablecloth on the table. Nice cool mess hall."

"We do have it better, all right," Stern laughed. "You and the Major will have to come up sometime and have a meal with me."

"Right; thanks." Singer still sounded a little derisive, as though he wanted to make it clear that he was a field soldier by nature.

The major had lit a cigaret and was staring at the smoke that rose from it like a tall feather in the heat. "See," he said. "That right there illustrates something else I pointed out to you while we were

coming over, Captain. These young guys get a month's duty here at the outpost, and by the end of the month they're damn eager to get back to the main island, dress up a little, get a little liquor and some better food — we've got a pretty good mess and club of our own at battalion, you know. Put on a necktie and date up a nurse. Anyway they've got something to look forward to. And the damn men have to stay out here for six months. Have to, nothing I can do about that. It's not too bad a break for the officer, and Cramer only had a day or two more to go before he was relieved."

"I suppose the attractions of the main island aren't very great, after all," Stern said.

The major frowned, "No. Hell no, when you come right down to it. But comparatively. Look at it comparative to this place. And that's the only way you can look at it that makes sense, it seems to me. Anything looks good after you've been here a month. Right, Singer? Right. And then the day before he gets relieved."

"I don't know," Stern said. "When you're in a bad spot whether you compare it to anything else. Maybe. I don't know whether I do or not."

Singer said, "I reckon if you'd been in any tough spot you'd have that figured out. Wouldn't he, Major?"

Looking at him when he said this, a little surprised at first, then recognizing some barely apparent but old familiar voice speaking through the man's emotion, Stern thought And if I would ask him now what tough spots he's been in in this war, he'd ask me what my name was. He sat for a little while turning his plate idly with his forefinger. "I was wondering about the men," he said. "You say they have to stay here six months . . ."

"Well," the major said, "that's one of those things that's a question everybody that has colored troops has to answer for himself. I've got a short answer for it for myself, and I never worry whether it will explain anything to anybody else. See, I think I've got as good a record as anybody for handling colored men, and the way I do it is never question what my higher-ups say to do with them. Take the situation they give you and work from that; make it as good as you can, but don't squawk. O.K., you'd say the black boys get the worst of the deal in the army. If I was going to argue, I'd admit that right off. But maybe it's as good as you can expect, the way things just naturally are. Anyway, I've seen a guy or two on this base who had colored men and tried to bull his way through what

headquarters told him to do and really got himself and his outfit in a royal mess. These guys would have been good officers, too. Both ways, they could have done a good job for their men if they hadn't tried to buck the set-up."

"Yes," said Stern.

"These guys have got in trouble and come to talk to me to see if I'll back them up, and they say, 'Look, such and such is wrong. Such a deal my boys got was wrong.' They want me to back them up because I've got a good record at headquarters for one thing, and they know I like my men. But I'd say to them, 'Don't tell me it was right or wrong. Maybe it was wrong. But you had a simple damn situation and you knew where you stood. You could have made something decent out of it and what have you got now except that thing in your eye?'"

Singer laughed.

The major had been stressing nearly every word he said, intently, almost with passion. Because it's a matter of faith by which you take a position like that, Stern thought, just as I have said to myself there's no other way to stay steady in the world . . . He said, "We do about the same thing in psychiatry. I never believe any conviction a patient has is right or wrong. I try to find some simple way this helter-skelter of his thoughts can be channeled to do him some good instead of hurting him. But you know, the funny thing is that even if I won't let them hang on to their arguments, I find myself turning them over and over in my own mind. I suppose everybody keeps the question of his own principles always open."

"Not while you're in the army," the major laughed. "I'm glad we agree though. I was a little on edge about having you out here. I can see we're going to work this out right, though. I haven't really asked you yet — I thought it wouldn't be ethical, or something — but do you see any reason why we can't call this thing suicide during temporary insanity?"

Diffidently Stern said, "It seems impossible to me, after a man's dead, to know without pretty good circumstantial evidence whether he was what we can legally call sane or not. I guess there isn't any reason for not calling it what you say."

"The main thing I'm after is to get it through properly and see that his folks get the insurance."

"It's good to have a feeling of personal responsibility about your men's affairs," Stern said, nodding and smiling.

"Sure. I take care of my guys. Isn't that right, Singer?" Stern thought he meant this clumsy question for a joke, but Singer said earnestly, "It really is, Captain." Stern wondered how he could say it just like that, but he saw it was meant for the truth and not for flattery. Surely there was a kind of innocence in these men. "I'm sure I'll be able to help you," Stern said. "Can I talk to some of the men?"

He studied a copy of the major's investigation until the men were gathered on the shadier side of the building. They came in then, one at a time, answering his questions politely, telling him, just as the major had it written down, how Lieutenant Cramer had come to supper that last night, what he had said to the sergeant — something about the crew roster for one of the lights — how he had played the radio in his little shack until after most of them were asleep, how they heard the shot and someone had run to his shack and found him.

Once in the course of the testimony, he heard an echo of thought so clearly stated as to be startling in its correspondence. One of the men said, "Sir, I believe he was about the best officer we ever had out here. When he wanted something done he didn't speak to the private about it." As he recognized this remark, Stern thought at first how strange the repetition was — as though the whole story might have been rehearsed among them. But in a minute it struck him this must seem so because no one had much to say, none knew much, about the dead man. From their point of view the story was short and very simple. It could do no good, he thought, to pry at their knowledge. From it he could learn no clues or motives better than those he had sensed when he first saw the isolation of this camp or when he found that the shore offered no haven from the heat and malaise he had felt in the boat.

Before he quit his examination, he asked the sergeant how the men spent their days here.

"To tell the truth, Captain, there isn't hardly anything to do now. We work around the camp a little and sometimes we have a practice on the lights. Somebody has to be the CQ on the phone and there's a little work in the kitchen."

"Most of your time is free?" Stern asked.

"I suppose you could call it free. We just sweat it out."

"Do you get pretty anxious to get back to the main island?"

"Oh no sir, we don't. We want to go home. That's about all."

"You swim and fish a little?"

"Yes sir."

"Did Lieutenant Cramer swim and fish with you?"

"No sir. He never appeared to care for that."

Throughout Stern's examinations the major sat close. He explained some references from time to time, smoked a good deal, paid close attention, sometimes nodding in agreement with the testimony. Stern said to him, "I don't see any use in talking to any more of them."

"You made up your mind?"

Stern shrugged, "I don't find out much one way or the other. A psychotic state isn't something you can just guess at after a man is dead. It's something you have to see, in one way or another, to describe. I don't know as much about Cramer as you do."

"Yeah, but you can write it down can't you?" the major asked. "You know, in medical terms just for the record. You know how the army is. It's got to be written up that way."

"I know the terms, yes," Stern said, "but what shall I write?"

In the major's eyes he saw the flickering of amazement, the unbelief of a man walking on solid ground who suddenly finds himself flung into a hidden snare — the unbelief which hangs a minute behind hostility.

"Why, that he did it while he was insane. You said . . ."

"That's just the thing I don't believe we can find out now, Major. You see, diagnosis is sometimes a more complex matter than an outsider would think. You've probably heard jokes about how long we talk to our patients. There's a reason for it." He sensed that the major was paying little attention to what he said, was only listening while he gathered himself for further argument. Stern concluded abruptly, trying to lighten the matter, "We ask them about their sex life. You've heard jokes about that."

"Well, he didn't have any sex life; that's for sure," the major said.

"What do you mean?"

"Why on this little island . . ."

"Oh yes," Stern said. "I misunderstood. Of course. But even there, Major, it isn't really correct to say a man has no sex life just because he has no contacts with women. It goes on continually in one way or another."

The major interrupted him by drumming his fingers on the table top angrily. "I don't think so. If I know what you're getting at. He was a nice sort of fellow. He was a grownup man."

"I was thinking in terms of fantasies and anxieties," Stern said.

The major looked at him with clear suspicion now. "I wouldn't know about that," he said.

"Those are the things I'd have to know."

"Look" — if the major was exasperated he controlled his feelings, spoke as though he were giving an order and wanted each word of it clearly understood. "You'll never know and I'll never know and the godalmighty war department will never know what was on that boy's mind. So what's the answer? For my part it's pretty plain, if we want to be decent about it: give the kid a break. Let his family put a gold star in the window and collect his insurance."

Stern opened his mouth to speak but let the moment pass. He noticed Singer watching him through narrowed lids and gave up the thought of further explanation. "I suppose I haven't any way to oppose that line of reasoning, Major. It sounds humane and practical."

"But you don't agree, huh?"

"I don't know," Stern said. He glanced again toward Singer and saw that young man make a disgusted face.

The major said, "I'll tell you what. You can make up your mind in a little while can't you? I'm anxious, damn it, to get this whole thing all straightened up. I've got plenty to do besides this investigation. You could write it up this afternoon, right now, couldn't you?"

"I'll do it if you want," said Stern.

"You can go over to the officer's shack if you want to. Matter of fact you'd probably like to look it over by yourself. Make up your own mind about it, see, without me influencing you. Singer and I will go down and take a swim off the landing. If you want me for anything, anything you want to know, just yell down."

The major and Lieutenant Singer walked out while Stern was gathering up the investigation report and the few notes he had made. Once out of his hearing, Singer said to the major, "What in hell is wrong with that guy?"

The major laughed, "He's just an odd character. I guess he'll do all right, though. Wants a little time to make up his mind."

"Damn stubborn wrong-headed Jew. Would anybody else take that attitude? Huh?"

"Now, Singer," the major said as he hurried down the sand. "Take a swim now and cool off."

"You'd think it was going to cost him money to get that insurance for Cramer," Singer said.

"No," the major said. "He's probably not used to making up his mind fast, I guess."

Singer said, "Well, if I blow my brains out, don't get that bastard out here on me, will you? You don't suppose he's going to louse things up for poor Cramer, do you?"

"If he does," the major said, "I'll get another psychiatrist to write it up. The IG is pretty well sold on the way I wrote up this investigation and he's going to let me get it through one way or another."

There was still no sliver of shade on the privy-like hut where Cramer had died. It was screened on four sides so a breeze could have come through it. But there was no breeze. When Stern sat at the desk inside, he could look down on the beach and on the nibbling tremor of the water at its bone-white edge. All around him — among the tents under the banana trees where lustrous weeds sprung into tangles too thick to walk through — there was no other movement to be seen. Everywhere was the unnatural stillness and the sun.

He knew that he must write what the major had so bluntly asked for. But in the moment of realizing this, he knew that he did not want to. Because he thought we agreed, he thought we looked at it the same? he asked himself. Why should I write what he wants instead of what Cramer wants? Then, amending the thought, no, instead of what I want?

On the surface we do agree, Stern thought. He considered how his two years in the Pacific had emphasized for him the beliefs which by training, and, as he thought, by temperament he held — that the choice which offers a practical course of action is the proper choice. "Don't tell me it was right or wrong"—the major's sentence was no less than the principle which he had followed in practice and in the army. Where, then, was his objection? Was the heat making him quarrelsome and petty? Was this the shadow of contagious emotions which he sometimes picked up from his patients, an emotional identification with Cramer which bordered on self-pity? An urge to contrariety because he felt the major overshadowed him? A desire to assert his ego by allying himself with the dramatic force of Cramer's suicide?

He thought again how little he could ever know of the dead man. His possessions, still as he had left them, showed nothing of any consequence — the uniforms hung neatly in the corner, the pipe and half-empty pack of cigarets on the desk, the little stack of technical manuals, a comic book on the floor, the line of shoes under the bed. There was a picture of Cramer and a rather nice-looking girl standing in front of some civic building somewhere and another of Cramer

with an older man and woman. There were a few letters with no particular individuality. There was a story in them, maybe, but no way to know it now. Only Cramer himself provided any continuity among these diverse scraps and shreds. Any of a million men might have lived in this hut a while and left identical traces.

He could not know the man's mind now — then why not smooth over the circumstances of his death, salvage fragments of some sort from the wreck? In one way it seemed sheer perversity to write an opinion which would not help save the slight things left.

Yet it was towards that perversity that his conception of the truth inclined him. In the absence of any findings, the really honest thing to do would be to report no findings.

Beyond that, less scrupulous but more urgent in its insistence, was the notion which he had got that this island and the broad approaches of the sea were like a contrived monument of isolation. If you stayed here, he thought, every day it would remind you of the absence and isolation you've known in your life. To live with these men, whose color and your rank made alien, not even to have the necessity of fixing your own food to keep you from thinking — with only two more days to wait here you might have looked so clearly into the emptiness of things that you would understand that you could not go back. It might be like freezing to death. After you give in to the cold, which has been there waiting for you always, you don't want to move. You get drowsy with it.

Even as he thought of this, Stern could imagine the major replying, "Freezing to death here?" and laughing as he rubbed the sweat out of his eyes.

Or memorizing the whole catechism of loneliness while you were shut on this worthless acre and knowing that you would always have it at the tip of your mind wherever you went after this. However deep the loneliness might have been, though, it was not the same thing as insanity.

It wasn't comforting to think of this unknown man swimming down into the loneliness he was finally too weak to stand. But all over the world now the bodies of men were going into holes and pits, into the flat dirt and taking with them unanswered questions, hatred and anger and disgust which nobody would ever speak, a bitterness that could never be paid back to them. And would you wipe this bitterness out of your sight because it was not comforting? You had shared their times and the world with them. What they thought and

wanted, you in some measure had wanted with them. How should death split this sharing? Or could you bring the truth, like a led horse, only to the edge of that pit, so if you went on across you had to go without it?

The ordinary slights and contempt that came to him in the army never made Stern intensely aware of his race; but in the presence of tragedy it was natural for him to assess it in terms of his own people — not his family, but many he had lived among not many years ago he knew had been starved and butchered in Poland. And how had their deaths been recorded, what empty, contemptuous phrases had gone into the archives to mask the bitterness of their death and the fact that they had been more than digits or names? Maybe worse than the guilt of their death was the denial that they had lived — diverse and intricate men and women. If he now wrote an opinion to explain away this man, in kindness though it might seem, he would make the same denial.

He could imagine himself trying to explain this to the major and saw the major shaking his head and saying, "Cramer wasn't a Jew." This thought came first to him as a sardonic commentary on the limits of the major's mind. And then the reply to it came — not comic now, but furious and furiously illuminating his growing dislike for the major. Because he was the same as them to me, Stern thought, the same as everybody killed in these bad years, and because you can keep your principles in question just so long and then if you haven't decided what's right and what's not the decision is made for you.

That's what the major did for me, he thought. Bringing me to this trap of an island and making me see it. And now I'm like him, because I didn't make up my mind in time and it's made up for me. There isn't any question any more. But there isn't anything I can say about it, either.

"He wants to get this straightened up," he thought. It seemed to him that if he could only get the major to see this death as something more than a milestone for those still alive, he might save something from the wreck of his own conscience.

Even so much was much more than he could expect. So he wrote a number of points which served to indicate that Cramer had killed himself while temporarily insane and then walked down the slope of coral and the beach to find the major. To get in the boat, to cross back again, fleeing the island.

RACHEL FRANK:

Unamuno: Existentialism and the Spanish Novel

The recent interest in literary and philosophical existentialism in this country might well be enriched by a consideration of one brilliant Spaniard, Miguel de Unamuno, some of whose most important works have been translated into English, although discussions of them in this country have unaccountably remained sidetracked in academic Hispanic journals. Compared with the elegance of a book like Albert Camus' *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Unamuno's theoretical writing is volcanic and unruly — the outpourings of a desperate mind and sensibility crying out the dissonances of his honesty. Temperamentally, Unamuno belongs to the tradition of Nietzsche and the later Tolstoy, and years before the Kierkegaardian vogue began to invade modish literary circles, he was laboriously studying Danish and acquiring a more intimate grasp of the man whose work bears so closely on his own spiritual preoccupations. He impressed his own values on an entire generation of Spanish writers — the famous Generation of 98, which produced such original literary figures as Ramón del Valle-Inclán, Juan Ramon Jiménez and Antonio Machado — by urging them away from the decorative versatility of the Nicaraguan poet, Rubén Darío, and leading them to confront the ultimate paradoxes of being. He poured himself forth in all genres — essays, poems, novels and dramas. Disdaining the fret of the craftsman who seeks to mold his art that it may stand apart from his own person, Unamuno everywhere chalked his work impetuously with his own initial, as if his writing were on the blackboard of eternity and might be erased at any moment.

I

This fear of being erased is, in fact, the central obsession which haunts his best-known book, *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* (*The Tragic Sense of Life*). What gives this work its impact is neither the subtlety of its intellection nor the originality of its discoveries. While Unamuno does have dialectical skill, he does not trust this gift enough to use it seriously as the only instrument which will yield

him the object of his search. Reason is merely part of man, whereas it is the whole man, "the man of flesh and bones" which alone concerns him. Too responsible a thinker to fall into a primitive antagonism to reason, Unamuno takes pains to do it reverence since reason is, after all, one of the identifying marks of the species man. "The most tragic problem of philosophy," he writes, "is to reconcile the intellectual needs with the emotional needs and with the needs of the will. And all philosophy which attempts to undo the eternal and tragic contradiction at the base of our existence fails." It is Unamuno's respect for reason which preserves him from dissolving this contradiction by simply eliminating reason as a factor. But if reason is not to be eliminated, it is even less to be overrated: reason alone can solve no ultimate problems; it cannot even define these problems for us. At the most, it can only construct for us a cage of necessary doubt.

Doubt of what? For Unamuno there is one "what" hovering over all "what's" — the "what" of immortality. No matter what empirical, logical or theological disguises the proof of its existence may have assumed, the desire for immortality is at bottom a thoroughly irrational longing. We cannot reasonably believe that the human consciousness eternally survives the body on which it depends. Now Unamuno insists that his hunger for immortality, his desire to persist forever, is genuine, and it is a hunger suffered by all human beings to the degree that they are honest. Yet he cannot accept orthodox religion, because while this might satisfy his hunger, it also violates his respect for reason. Nor can he resign himself to the variety of palliatives — sober or exciting — that pass for "humanism." While such points of view respect the limits of reason, they ignore the profound affirmation of his will to survive beyond death. Is it possible, he asks, to reconcile this emotional drive of the will towards immortality with its rational absurdity? And his answer is no. By nature the two are at odds. It is absurd to believe in immortality. Must one, therefore, abandon this belief? No: one must affirm it in the face of its absurdity. Rather, the belief should be insisted upon precisely because it is an injustice to man that he should be forever wiped out after having been plunged into an existence whose meaning mystifies him, yet whose mystery tantalizes him so that it fans his spirit into awareness. Confused and miserable though this spirit may be, it at least possesses the dignity of knowing its own powerlessness to save itself from a vacuum. Yet man can even

heighten his dignity by protesting against his limitations. Not resignation but rebellion is the posture to be taken; not humility, but rage; not silence, but a noisy and terrible lamentation against the nothingness of impending death.

Unamuno is openly jealous of the gods, and he everywhere proclaims his own ridiculous plight — the plight of a man who feels like a god yet cannot be one. What saves his attitude from brash egotism is that he extends his sympathy to all those who, like himself, are so strong that they want to surpass themselves, yet who, being merely human, must likewise gnash their teeth against the veiled circumstances bitterly surrounding their species. And he is a writer who deserves to be experienced for the mighty boldness which he packs into his rebellion, the passionately unembarrassed naiveté with which he bares his confession to the reader, the pity and austerity with which he insists on his theme — refusing to stoop to fancy devices to entertain the reader.

II

For all his affinities with European thought, it is no accident that Unamuno constantly points to Spanish prototypes who embody his own attitudes. He does not claim to be the first Spaniard to suffer from the metaphysical malady. The grotesque character blundering through a world he does not understand, a world less real than his own imaginings, is a favorite among Spaniards. The great mystics, St. John of the Cross and St. Theresa, had no patience with any obstacles between themselves and God. And Unamuno likewise brushes aside the courtly ceremonies of Catholicism in favor of an invisible temple where he may worship in his own profane way. Common sense and good taste are blind; Unamuno prefers the exalted bungling of Don Quijote. Calderon's Segismundo, of *La vida es sueño* (*Life is a Dream*) was also one of those who wandered along the edge of his dream, not knowing whether his plunge into the social world was less of a dream than his private one. For Unamuno, such semi-madness is the only attitude to be championed, since it is the only one which corresponds to a true confrontation of man's plight.

Once man realizes that death is real, then the constant consciousness of death must reduce all things in life to unreality. Though he is still in life, he cannot participate in it with conviction because death seems more real. But though the fact of death is more real, the after-

math of death is even less real than its present awareness. Reality, then, loses its constancy, shifting from the awareness of death to the awareness that one is at least alive; and yet it does not wholly settle upon aliveness since that cannot last forever in each man. Thence arises the terrible disparity between man's vision of infinite survival and his physical limitations. In his play, *El otro* (*The Other*), a kind of metaphysical comedy of errors in which one twin brother kills the other, although he cannot be sure whether it was his brother or himself that he killed, Unamuno applies the uncertainty of reality to the theme of identity. It is as if both brothers had been one originally, and had then, out of an irreconcilable conflict, split into two persons. Each is an enemy of the other, yet so much a part of him that when one is killed the other is not certain that he has not committed suicide. To be sure, this type of conception, — the double — is not a new one and, assuming it were worth the trouble, could doubtlessly be traced back to the Egyptian *ka* — man's immortal double which supplemented his soul. If one were to trace it back at all, its closest parallel would probably lie with the notion of the *Doppelgänger*, elaborated by such German romanticists as Tieck, Kleist and Brentano. The dualism implied in the idea of the *Doppelgänger* is not to be confused, however, with the separation of the body and soul; it is much nearer to what our modern psychologists mean when they speak of the split personality. But the difference between the Germans' use of this idea and the clinical one is that the former attached a metaphysical meaning to this separation in which the individual confronts his two selves — the one limitless the other limited, the one infinite, the other finite. Another difference between this use of the double and the way it has been employed in English literature — for example, by Stevenson in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* — is that the double is objectified as a separate person, rather than being merely another side of a single character. In whatever he writes, we find Unamuno's finite self quarreling with his infinite self, each doubting the reality of the other. It is out of this same anxiety that the Cain and Abel legend appears in a novelistic variation, *Abel Sánchez*, the story of the unconquerable envy felt by Joaquín Monegro towards his childhood friend, the gifted painter, Abel Sánchez. Joaquín loves his friend outwardly, but hates him inwardly because Abel has won survival in his works, while Joaquín's spirit must die with his own person.

The charge has been levelled against Unamuno that no matter

what genre he may profess to use, the individual work tends to reduce itself to a monologue. Strictly speaking, his works are often soliloquies masquerading as an argumentative kind of dialog. The spokesmen are separate characters; each has a name and sometimes a habitation of his own. But the umbilical cord between their own being and the author's has not been cut. Whether this be a defect of his artistry or the rich, obverse side of his immense will-to-personality ought not, in Unamuno's case, to be answered dogmatically. We do not look for Poussin's complicated equipoise in Van Gogh, nor for Van Gogh's ecstatic fury in the mystical arithmetic of Mondrian's sedate lines and spaces. Unamuno is no Flaubert, who sacrifices his own personality on the altar of his sublimated selves — his novelistic creatures — that they may live fuller lives of their own. Unamuno's characters are his servants, not his masters. His relation to his characters is like that of the stone out of which Michelangelo's slave struggles to free himself. The effect is unfinished; but this same incompleteness bestows a vigorous dramatic meaning on the sculpture that no amount of polish could ever help it to attain.

It is through Augusto Pérez, the hero of the novel *Niebla* (Mist), that the implicit servitude of Unamuno's characters is made not only vocal, but rebellious. Augusto has decided to commit suicide and, in the thirty-first chapter, he visits Unamuno to confer with him about it. Up to this time, Unamuno himself does not appear in the novel. We are presented only with the fictional characters — chiefly Pérez, a timid, ironic dreamer, more conscious than he is effectual, and Eulalia, a young piano teacher with whom he is in love, and who turns out to be a militant firebrand, less impassioned of music or Pérez than she is of her own amoebic lover, Mauricio. When Mauricio deserts her, she offers to marry Pérez. The marriage never takes place, though, because Eulalia has absconded with Mauricio, shocking Pérez into a suicidal state of humiliation.

The scene in which Pérez confronts his author is one of the most tragicomic in all modern literature. Learning that Unamuno has written an essay on suicide, Pérez decides to consult this great authority. He comes to Unamuno's study and announces his intention of committing suicide. But Unamuno tells him he cannot commit suicide, since he is not even alive, he is merely fiction. Pérez insists that, in a sense, he is even more real than Unamuno, and has a perfect right to take his own life. This infuriates Unamuno. "... You're

not going to commit suicide," he thunders, "because I am going to kill you." The prospect of being killed by his author is more than Pérez can bear, and he confesses that the reason he wanted to kill himself was that he lacked the courage to kill Unamuno, the creator who placed him in his predicament. Outraged, Unamuno is even more confirmed in his decision. Pérez falls to his knees in a panic, begging to be left alive. "Don Miguel, for God's sake, I want to live. I want to be me!"

"It can't be done, poor Augusto . . . it can't be done! I've already written it and it's irrevocable; you can't live any more. I don't know what to do with you. When God doesn't know what to do with us, he kills us. And I'm not forgetting that the idea of killing me passed through your mind"

Realizing the futility of argument, Pérez hurls a vengeful speech at his author — a speech which Unamuno cannot refute.

"So you won't, eh? So you won't? You don't want to let me be, get out of the fog, live, live, live, see myself, hear myself, touch myself, feel myself, suffer, be myself; so you don't want to do it? So I'm supposed to die a fictional entity? Very well, my dear Mr. Creator, Don Miguel, you too will die, you too, and will return to the nothingness you came out of. God will stop dreaming you. You will die, yes, you will die, even though you may not want to; you will die and all who read my history will die, all, all, all, without one being left. Fictional beings like me; just like me! All, all, all will die. It's I who tell you this, I Augusto Pérez, a fictional entity like yourselves"

Offhand, the illusionistic somersaults of *Niebla* recall Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. But the habit of reducing a book to one of its possible borrowed technical elements can be, as we know, both easy and misleading. It is by the use to which an author puts what he may have appropriated that we judge him. And we value the scene in which Pérez confronts Unamuno less for the novelty of the device than for its relevance to Unamuno's dilemma.

Apart from its breathtaking audacity towards the reader, what makes this scene so startling is the brilliant economy with which it integrates all the disquieting forces of Unamuno's spirit. Here we have his own fear and rebellion against impending death whined forth by his novelistic creature, whom he creates in the first place so that it may outlive his doomed personal self. But his personal, finite self is in constant conflict with his eternal self. While Pérez

is jealous of Unamuno's flesh and blood, which entitles him to be a person, Unamuno is jealous of Augusto Pérez's immortality, which he himself, being merely a person, will never be able to enjoy. And when Augusto reveals his desire to kill him, Unamuno's threat to kill Augusto in return is merely his futile defense against his conviction that Augusto's reality will, in the end, eclipse his own. Unamuno's entrance into the novel, then, resolves the conflict in two ways: first, by expressing this conflict directly, and exhausting its tension; second, by his superimposing the personal realm on the novelistic, and posing, as it were, along with his characters, in order to acquire their kind of reality without losing his own identity as a person.

Unamuno plays at God in this novel — an arbitrary God who does what he pleases with his personages in spite of their protest that he is violating their inner logic. This attitude, again, is not far removed from the romantic irony extolled by the Schlegels and adopted by many of the German romanticists. For them, as Novalis wrote, the world was to be regarded as "a beautiful illusion, a work of genius, a noble play." The artist looks upon his work with the same comico-serious air as he does upon the world, according to Friedrich Schlegel. "From the height of his spirit . . . the poet . . . seems to laugh down upon his masterpiece . . . as if it were not in sacred earnest." And as Hegel remarked in his *Lectures on Esthetics*, the ironic artist feels himself to be in the position of a god, independent of everything and everyone which, from his point of view, has no substantial being. And not being tied to anything, he may create or destroy at will. In other words, the ironic artist is the virtuoso par excellence, a virtuoso no more rational than the infinitely greater virtuoso he imitates — that is to say, God. And he imitates him by also creating an arbitrary, deceptive world — a world which he can destroy as easily as create. But though, in the end, Unamuno kills Augusto as if he were God, it is with the ungodlike awareness that Augusto's threat will be made good.

In spite of the multiple analogies it presents of the human condition, *Niebla* is more a spectrum than a mirror of life. God's relation to Unamuno is echoed by Unamuno's relation to Pérez. Yet if Unamuno is a god to Pérez, Pérez is likewise a god to his foundling dog, Orfeo. The stricken, bewildered animal dies at Pérez's feet after mourning his master's death in an extended funeral oration which is a masterpiece of parody. "What a queer animal is man! . . . There's

no way of knowing what he wants, granted that he himself knows it . . . He has his own way of barking — he speaks, and this has made him invent what is not and ignore what is. Once he gives something a name, he doesn't see this something any more; all he does is hear the name he gave it and see it written. Language makes him lie; it makes him invent what doesn't exist and confuse himself . . . He's a sick animal, no question about it. He's always sick! He only seems to enjoy a bit of health when he's asleep, and not always then, because at times he even talks in his sleep."

III

In Augusto Pérez, Unamuno shows his preference for the character who is too sensitive for mediocrity, too kind for villainy, yet too indecisive for heroism. Pérez is a Spanish Prufrock — a bored, pusillanimous, watered-down Hamlet; but he is both funnier and more pathetic than Eliot's well-known symbol of modern impotence, and this, in the end, makes him more human. Besides, though he knows himself for a victim, Pérez still can muster just enough energy to protest; and in protesting, he carries out Unamuno's own design of revolt against man's enigmatic status.

Harmony has no place in this status where man — an unpredictable entity of warring extremes — typically finds himself in the dilemma we have defined. The characters involved in this dilemma may try to fight against its conditions. Like Pérez, Raquel, in the short novel, *Dos madres (Two Mothers)*, cannot bear to face her destiny — in her case, sterility. Though she is Don Juan's mistress, and he wants to marry her, she is so desperate for children that she urges him to marry another woman and have a child by her. But she considers this future child her own, and makes elaborate plans to take possession of it. Here again Unamuno presents a character protesting against her physical, finite limitations, scheming to outwit the logic of her being. There is also a contradictory dissociation of sex and motherhood in the character of Tía Tula, Aunt Tula, the heroine of the novel by that name. Tía Tula's own maternal drive impels her to urge her sister into marriage and encourage her fertility so that, on her sister's death, she may ultimately take over the relished job of rearing the children. Finding herself in the paradoxical position of living chastely in the same house with her brother-in-law while caring for his children, Tula refuses his overtures of

marriage; but when he takes up with the maid, she engineers him into marrying the maid on condition that her own supervision of the children will not be disturbed.

Indeed, the drive towards reproduction figures so prominently in Unamuno's work, that, as one of the most common and least conscious attempts to achieve immortality, it offers a striking contrast to the more tortuous and despairing attitudes of existentialists like Kierkegaard and Kafka. Unamuno himself was the father of a numerous and healthy brood. Kafka, on the other hand, was pursued throughout his life by the fear of being unable to sustain a normal emotional relationship, while Kierkegaard, as is known, broke his engagement with Regina Olsen because he felt it would be unfair to saddle her with his burden of guilt.

In sum, therefore, we can see that there are noticeable disparities between the attitude towards experience expressed in Unamuno's work and what we have come to regard as typical of so-called existentialist writing. Granted a single point of departure — the absurdity of existence — Unamuno's work proves that there is no reason why its consequences should be limited to one attitude. For Jean Paul Sartre, as for Nietzsche, existence is physically repulsive, nauseating, literally indigestible. For Albert Camus, existence is an indifferent spectacle of hollow alternatives to which one resigns himself best by adopting an epicurean pose. For Kafka, existence is a silent nightmare of inexplicable humiliations, unrelieved by vengeance or even by protest. Now, Unamuno belongs to this group of moderns who find existence opaque and incomprehensible. But unlike these, as we have seen, his final attitude is not one of complete despair before the *nada*. While it is true that a figure like Kierkegaard will often summon up humor with which to face his anxieties, this humor, instead of lightening, intensifies the sense of suffering expressed in his writing. Unamuno's humor, on the other hand, warmed by his expression of the quixotic incongruity between man's desires and his achievements, buoys up his fundamental sense of tragedy by its sheer tomfoolery, its spontaneous nonsense. And the backbone of this nonsense — Unamuno's peculiar contribution to the existentialist group — is the Job-like blasphemy with which he incites to rebellion against man's predicament, even though this rebellion may be a tilting at windmills.

FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA:

Ballad of the Spanish Civil Guard

Translated by Lysander Kemp

Their horses are black, the shoes of their horses are black,
smudges of ink and candlewax gleam on their capes;
because their skulls are of lead, they cannot weep.
Hunchbacked, nocturnal, with patent-leather souls,
they gallop the roadways, everywhere inflicting
a silence of dark rubber, terrors of fine sand.
They pass, if they care to pass, and hide in their heads
a spectral astronomy made of intangible pistols.

O city of gypsies! The banners at every corner.
The moon and the gourd. City of grief and musk,
O city of gypsies! with towers of cinnamon: there,
at night, in the night, the gypsies at their forges
make suns and arrows, there the wounded horse
is pounding at all the gates, and the crystal cocks
of Jerez loudly sing. The wind is naked,
the wind is turning the corner of surprise,
the wind at night, in the night, in the silver night.

The Virgin and Joseph have lost their castanets,
and look for the gypsies to ask if they can find them.
St. Joseph waggles his arms in a silken cape,
and the Virgin is dressed in the gown of a mayor's wife,
made of the foil from chocolate, with collar of almonds;
behind them, Pedro Domecq (renowned for wines)
converses grandly with three sultans of Persia.
The moon is dreaming an ecstasy of storks,
banners and lanterns invade the city roofs,
the slender dancers move through mirrors sobbing.
Water and shadow, shadow and water at Jerez.

O city of gypsies! The banners at every corner.
Douse your gay green lights, the "Worthies" are coming.

O city of gypsies! Who saw you and cannot remember?
 Leave her far from the sea, no comb for her locks.

The Guard advances two abreast on the city,
 rumors of immortelles in their cartridge-boxes.
 Two abreast. A double nocturne of cloth.
 To them the starry sky is a showcase of spurs.

The festival city is multiplying its gates,
 through them the Civil Guard advances to plunder.
 Clocks stop dead; the brandy averts suspicion,
 disguising itself in its bottles as November.
 Screams arise in a covey above the windvanes,
 and sabres hack the breezes trampled by hooves,
 while down the streets in the shadows the ancient gypsies
 flee with their sleepy horses, their pots of money.
 The sinister capes ascend the tilting streets,
 cruelly leaving behind them a whirlwind of scissors.

The gypsies are gathered now at Bethlehem gate,
 the obstinate sharp rifles clatter all night.
 Saint Joseph, badly wounded, shrouds a dead girl,
 the Virgin is healing children with spittle of stars,
 but alas, the Guard advances, sowing flame
 where naked and young the imagination burns.
 Rosa is groaning, seated beside her door,
 both of her breasts cut off and arranged on a tray.
 Blossoms of powder blackly shatter the air.
 When every roof is a furrow along the ground,
 the daybreak shrugs its shoulders over the ridge.

O city of gypsies! The Civil Guard withdraws,
 down a tunnel of silence. The fire still surrounds you.

O city of gypsies! Who saw you and cannot remember?
 My city, let them hunt you here in my forehead,
 O city of gypsies, game of moon and of sand.

WILLIAM HUMPHREY:

In Sickness and Health

(For Harry Grabstald)

Mr. Grogan's bald head broke unexpectedly through the covers like a stone heaved up by a hard frost. An eye thawed open and he experimented with his nose; it rattled like steampipes warming up. He was so stiff he felt that all the veins in his body must have froze and busted. The other eye fell open and he wriggled painfully out, feeling, after only one day in bed, stiff and strange as an old snake crawling out of hibernation. Now if only he had stayed on his feet as he had insisted, he would have been hearty as a buck again this morning.

He could hear his wife down below walloping up his breakfast, doubtless assuring herself that he was so near dead he would never hear her, murmuring soft little Viennese curses when her big hulk rolled into the cabinet corner. Mr. Grogan licked a fingertip and scrubbed the corners of his eyes; when she came up he would look long awake, though he had not been able to get up.

Mr. Grogan was an early riser. You couldn't tell her otherwise and his wife had the notion he did it to make her look lazy. He just wanted to get out of a morning without the sight of her and that was the truth of the matter. Maybe she was brighter than he took her for and just as spiteful as he knew she was and wanted to rob him of that one pleasure. One reason or another she could be heard scrambling and puffing in the mornings trying to get down before he did and now he could just imagine how pleased with herself she was today. Up first for two days running it made her and for that alone the woman would have swapped her saint's day, but to be able, not once only but twice to come toting his breakfast to him up in bed and not able to get out of it, now that was more humiliation than she could have thought up for him.

He knew just how her mind was working. Had the woman stopped now to consider that he just might be better this morning? Not for an instant. She was too cheerful down there for such a shadow to have passed even momentarily across her mind. An hour at least she must have lolled abed, a big smug look lying on her face, thinking to herself how, even after time for the alarm, she might

go right on lying there as long as pleased her and still be first down in the kitchen. No racing down this morning, no colliding in the hall, no frowzy hair nor unlaced shoes, all to see which — and he it was just about always — could be sitting there polishing off his coffee with a distant foregone glance for the stay-a-bed. Yes, she had that kind of a nasty mind. And he could guess the trouble she must have been to, deciding whether to keep the doors from the kitchen up to his room open or shut, whether she would rather have him hear her big-hearted efforts getting his breakfast, or burst in on him with it and shove it under his snoring nose like fresh evidence at a trial.

The breakfast she came up with would have winded a slender woman. The trouble she had been to would show in quantity, she must figure, and now she was to have the pleasure of seeing him eat it, all of it, eat a cartload and he would too rather than give her the satisfaction of seeing that he had no appetite.

“Ah, liebchen, no better, hah?” she grinned and when he opened his mouth to remonstrate she drew a concealed thermometer and poked it in him as if she wanted to see how full from the bottom he was. Mr. Grogan lay there with it stuck out defiantly, making it seem there was so much of her he had to look first around one side of it, then around the other to take it all in. She had got herself up discouragingly like a nurse, grave and antiseptic and when she bent over to gauge his depth again he saw his head fall like a speck on her starched eyeball. She stood over him regally, she did every chance she got, though how she managed it he never could puzzle out. Mrs. Grogan carried her head with great pride of ownership, as though she had shot it in Ceylon and had it mounted on a plaque. She must have thought the longer she left the thermometer in the higher it would go. He started to take it out but she beat him to it.

“Ah,” she sighed, regarding it with expansive pleasure, “Ah-hah.”

Nothing could have made Mr. Grogan ask her what it said. Not even if he had believed she knew how to read the thing.

Now the time had come to watch him eat. Very carefully she brought a little rocker up close. Fluffing her skirts and shaking out her bottom she examined the seat she had in mind and eased herself gently down. Mr. Grogan recognized her caution. It was a part of the elaborate respect she had taken to showing for his property. God knew he had never denied the woman anything in a material way, why, he had never even tried to, so what had got into her? For within the past year Mrs. Grogan has added to her regular show

of grievances a bitter pageant of personal dispossession. Everything in the house being his, she will use only those things necessary to the maintenance of his welfare and that carefully, that he may have them for his next wife once she has passed on. There is nothing she can expect to leave to her daughters but his next wife at least will find a house better equipped than she found it. All this with such a look as clearly says he will be long in the ground before she has done party-going even, as he is sure she plans to take up in earnest once he is out of her way.

Her concern was forgot as soon as she was seated and in her delight in watching him she began to rock herself contentedly, her generous liquids swishing in her like a churn. When he had finished she got up and stood solid as a crock, waiting for breath to rise.

Mr. Grogan pushed down his coffee and even managed a smile for it. His mouth swung open in a yawn, creaked once and then blew shut.

"That's what you need," she said, clearing away the dishes, "plenty sleep and decent food," and the way she said it you might think she had found him in a doorway on the Bowery and given him the first home he had known in twenty years.

"Well, you don't," he replied, right pleased with himself, but she was gone. Amazing, truly, how fast she could move that great body of hers when it meant getting out in time to have the last word herself.

Now she would be standing at the head of the basement steps, looking mournfully down, then heave out all her air in a vast sigh, preparing to submerge like a U-boat taking on water. He could hear her settle slowly down the steps, come heavily to rest on the bottom and scrape her way over to the coal-bin. There was no subtlety in her and that was the thing he resented most. There she went down rattling the furnace and might be Mrs. Beelzebub opening shop. Soon she would come up to demonstrate her pains, her big stuffed face glowing, complaining of the heat, the dirt, the waste of coal and were he to dare remind her that he, certainly, required no fire, why, she would burst. What would she have done if he hadn't come down like this? Last winter she had practically turned blue before she would ask him to build a fire, it looked as if she were dead, frozen in the attitudes of the living, and you wouldn't know it until she thawed out in the spring. But that had not taught her and this time she would have moved out sooner than admit she was cold —

though how she could get cold through all her insulation was more than he could guess. But cold she was, stiff as untried lard and here was himself with his hundred and twenty pounds and that old and ailing and all along he might have been a teapot in a cozy, he told himself, while the yellowed old teeth danced in his mouth like popcorn in a pan.

She said nothing, she could not, stood at the door, grateful for having made the stairs once again, opened her mouth and stoked herself with a few lumps of air. She had been sure to get good and smeared with soot and coal-dust and not stop to wash any of it. Mr. Grogan had thrown back two of his blankets and was smoking the pipe she had forbidden him, though he did not dare inhale for fear of a coughing spell. So smug she looked turning up his radiator, her sleeves rolled back, just stifling for his comfort, that he could not resist asking, "Would you mind raising up that window there while you're close by?" but she turned on him such a smile as she might have given a child she was holding for ransom.

After that she left him suspiciously alone. He felt she was pickling him in this bed, like hassenpfeffer, and would come back in a week to see if he was to her taste. Maybe she was thinking that alone he would enjoy a nice warm room, a day in bed with meals brought up, realize how much he did owe her to be sure. But even if it were pleasant would she let a man enjoy it? And on that sour thought his pipe drained in his mouth and started a coughing fit that very nearly choked him in trying to keep her from hearing. Ah, Grogan, he chided himself, wouldn't it have been better now to build a fire back in November and wear a muffler like she said? A stubborn rattling No wheezed through him. But wouldn't it now, didn't he regret the false front of good health and didn't he wish he had confessed to sniffles three days ago and staved off what was sure to develop into pneumonia? Come now, were things that black truly? Well, he was not exactly what you might call hale, but nobody but himself would ever know it and better by far than she gave him the credit of. He still cut a pretty sturdy figure and you never heard him complain. In fact, he had been maybe a little too uncomplaining and if that were so he could just point out where to lay the blame. What else could a man do only swallow down his aches and pains, never mention them nor so much as let them be guessed when he knew that if they were her face would light up at every hole like somebody had put a new candle in it. Many the

time he had felt so bad that younger men than he by years would have spent the week in bed and he had got right up, first, too, more like than not, made his own breakfast it went without saying and gone to work with a smile and a tipped hat for everybody on the street. Meanwhile she had been busy giving him a standing with the neighbors that she never dreamed was noble. "Oh, I'm very well, Mrs. Harriman, very well indeed; it's Mr. Grogan, you know," over the back fence she would sadly volunteer, for no one ever thought to ask after such a chipper man. In those days Mr. Grogan got no end of delight in knowing that to the neighbors his wife was making herself either a liar or a lunatic. He would rush out and start weeding his garden in a flaming fury as soon as he caught sight of her on the fence wistfully inviting Mrs. Harriman to look up at the poor man's window. Or he would trot down the street and catch flies as the kids played baseball, wind up and burn the ball home. He just wished she could have seen the neighbors' faces then.

But people are always anxious to believe the worst about someone else's health and then he may have peacocked it a bit, he supposed he did. The neighbors respected him, stood aside on the walks, offered little services and some of them went so far as to consult him about their own illnesses he being such a fine example of how to bear so many. Not that he wanted their attention; if he played up to all this ever so little it was because it was pleasant to see her program turning out so different from the way she planned it.

Soon though it got to looking that they were saying among themselves, Well, here comes that poor half-dead fool Grogan with no idea of all that's going on inside himself. There did seem to be such a conspiracy against him he had thought more than once of taking a loss on his equity in his house and finding a new neighborhood. Hereabouts just to walk down the block of an afternoon made him feel the morgue had given him a day off his slab.

Now another situation held among Mr. Grogan's friends and it was only this that kept him on his feet. Mr. Grogan was a great one for broadening himself with new friends and he was attracted naturally and by principle to young men. The few Mrs. Grogan had managed to keep were as old and mostly older than herself. Her claim was that he palled with his young whelps in a vain and unbecoming attempt to imagine himself their age again. But this, he knew, was to cover her guilt for avoiding all younger women that she might not appear any older by contrast and comparing her own fine fat state daily to the failing energies of her old crones.

Mr. Grogan prided himself that though some embarrassment had been unavoidable, he had done a thorough and on the whole a tactful job of keeping his friends away from his wife. They, then, had no reason for not taking his word that he enjoyed excellent health. Not one of them but would have had trouble believing otherwise of anybody and Mr. Grogan when he was with them never felt an ache and was sure he never would again. So it was shocking to slip like a ghost down the three blocks nearest his house, turn the corner and enter McLeary's tavern like the playboy of Western Long Island.

Just the kind of a shock Mr. Grogan would have welcomed when toward eleven o'clock there came up to him the sound of substantial steps on the back stoop and he heard his wife greet her friend Mr. Rauschning the baker. Into the kitchen they would go where she would stuff him with the marzipan she bought from him at cutthroat prices, so Mr. Grogan expected, but instead he heard them after a couple of gruss Gott's on the steps up to his room and the two of them rumbled in like a panzer division taking over. Rauschning lingered mightily on the footboard looking over into Grogan's paddy and Mr. Grogan grunted back at the big flat square head with the ears hanging off it. Mr. Rauschning took the cigar from his mouth, turned it over and over, squinting as though he could read his temperature on it, was satisfied that it might never be as alarming as Grogan's and stuck it in again.

"Ja," he grunted and to this pronouncement Mrs. Grogan nodded gravely.

Neighborhood kids said that Rauschning soured his dough by scowling at it but to Mr. Grogan he was no surlier than the rest of his compatriots. To him it seemed that all his wife's friends wore a look that refused admitting even two minor setbacks and warning everybody to just wait until next time, a petty insolence to which he contrasted the noble defiance of generations of Irishmen oppressed by the same grievance.

"Since yesterday morning," his wife commented on his condition and Rauschning nodded; he could have predicted it to the hour.

"And the Herr doctor, what does he say?"

"Hah! What doctor?"

Mr. Rauschning said ah-hah. Between them his fate was sealed.

Mr. Rauschning said, "He should get pumpernickel, lots of pumpernickel. You got pumpernickel in the house? Grobstoffe."

"He likes thin toast." She almost sprayed crumbs all over the room.

And look what it's brought him to, that was how they stood, and look at us.

"Well, how's the bakery business?" Mr. Grogan inquired amiably and wished he hadn't as Rauschning nodded faintly to a man who would soon have little concern over the staff of life. A sad case; his handkerchief came up to the big flat-fronted nose that hung out of his face like a necktie. When he was done blowing the thing he ran the knot of it back up between his brows.

"Sniffles?" Mr. Grogan asked.

"Well, Grogan, I hope you get better," he said and turned back at the door to add, "—soon," turning to Mrs. Grogan to indicate that his anxiety was for her as well as his condolences, for hopes, before such evidence, were vain, ending with a smile of agreement that she will be better off of course and anyhow a good strong German woman would always get by.

Now they are gone and Mr. Grogan thinks he will just forget they were ever there, doze off wishing the two of them off on one another. But that would suit her too well; ah, how often has she wished aloud for the likes of him herself, him or her first husband back again, whose speckled portrait sits on her bureau fading a little more each year as though still fleeing the vigor of her tongue.

The two dearest friends Mrs. Grogan owned came around noon to have the invalid exhibited to them. His wife had phoned everybody she knew the night before when she had him drugged asleep, urged them all over for a laugh he decided, but there stirred in him suddenly a fear that something unmistakably desperate in his appearance that was plain to all but him, something that they figured would this morning come to an inevitable crisis, something that had escaped him while draining away his very life, something horrible had summoned them all this morning with no help from her necessary. Was it possible? Had she been right all along, sincere, and the neighbors, had they honestly seen it coming?

They came up while he was feeling himself frantically for ailments he might have overlooked. They were Miss Hinkle and Mrs. Schlegelin and it was easy to see how even Mrs. Grogan could feel secure in their company. Miss Hinkle came in with a twitter at being in a man's bedroom and Mrs. Grogan was astonished that any woman could feel that way in the room of a man with so little of his manhood left him. The sight of Mrs. Schlegelin could make Mr. Grogan feel there was hope for even him, for who ever saw such a

thing so skinny from head to toe, a walking hammer handle, the plaits of her hair sticking out behind stiff as nail claws.

"Like the flu, looks maybe," she diagnosed. "Like mein Helmut exactly when mit flu was coming down."

Mr. Grogan snorted, thinking how much more than flu he would have to have to look at all like her Helmut. Mrs. Grogan swelled self-righteously.

Miss Hinkle, terrified that she might catch sight of a bed-pan, squealed, "Elsa, smells here just like in Germany in the epidemic, ain't it?"

A desolate dank smell settled on the room and to Mr. Grogan's mind there arose the vision of plague-riddled streets and mutilated corpses swelling in gutters.

"Hush, Hedvig, no," shooshed Mrs. Schlegelin, her nose climbing up her face and Miss Hinkle sniggered.

And they said other things, even after Mr. Grogan slowly flourished from the drawer of his nightstand two abandoned wads of chewing gum, really two waxen cotton plugs and screwed them into his ears.

A tactic he had developed some time back. Mr. Grogan disliked using it, it made for all sorts of trouble but was almost worth them all and was surely called for now. Wax-treated cotton they were, soft, easily got in and they set like cement. Twenty-five cents a month bought a private little world all his own. The price she resented. With a display of thrift and resourcefulness she bought a roll of cotton big enough for quilting, a tin of tallow and made her own. She looked to be troubled with his voice for even longer than he ever hoped. For a while it piqued him. Now he simply had to laugh. One of many examples it became of her racial penny-wiseness, because he could make himself heard to her with but the tiniest elevation of his ordinary tone while she had to shout herself hoarse.

You could not insult them. They left. Not before they were ready but they might have spent the night for all of Emmett Grogan. He was sealed in, with smiles rising up like bubbles in new wine. Soon soured. There was no convincing himself that this solitude was at all what he wanted. He was lonely in there. And he feared that these last two were not the last by any means; a long list of Mrs. Grogan's agglutinated acquaintance rolled across his brain, the two down in the kitchen being welcome compared to some. He uncorked one ear and a dull whistle of plattdeutsch rushed in.

Mr. Grogan gave himself a shake to unstick a joint or two, threw

the covers back and carefully watched himself get up, afraid of leaving something behind. Sadly he wrenched himself from under his nightgown. Once in his pants he knew how much he had shrunk. Breaking up, he could see it in the mirror. But it was never a clear glass and the light poorly and moreover it was a man had spent a day in bed. Lying there that way the flesh slid of its own weight off the bones in front and would take time to get properly rearranged. He would know in McLeary's tavern. Someone would be sure to remark, Grogan, you're not looking yourself — which he was bound to admit, that is, not looking *himself*, meaning that a slight change in a ruddy face was enough for decent well-meant concern that never for a minute overstated the case.

Down the steps stealthily went Mr. Grogan that his wife would not hear the labor it cost him, his eyes steady on the landing where he planned a rest, but as he reached it his wife brought her guests from the kitchen to see them out the front door; from somewhere he dug up the strength to trot briskly by.

"Don't wait supper on me," he flung at them without so much as a glance over his shoulder. And his spurt of exertion turned out to be the very thing he had been needing. He knew all along it was.

Housewives were indoors, children in school, dogs in kennels, Ireland still in the Atlantic, Germany in ruins and Emmett Grogan was in the street. Natural phenomena all. There was a list to his step that passed for a swagger as he crashed the door to McLeary's. The place was deserted. McLeary hung over a scratch-sheet at the far end of the bar and he tucked it grudgingly away while Mr. Grogan ascended a stool. Somebody had surely pickled McLeary as a foetus but he kept growing, had been lately discovered, spilled out and set going. Little half-opened eyes were getting a start in his squashed face, he was adenoidal, pot-bellied, vestigial, but to Mr. Grogan he looked good.

"Leave the bottle?" he asked after pouring a shot, to which Mr. Grogan nodded carelessly. McLeary went back immediately to his scratch-sheet. Mr. Grogan tamped another down, and felt his insides warm, yawn, stretch and get up. He got down from his stool, looked annoyed with the sunlight at his end of the counter and moved with his bottle down nearer McLeary.

"Something else, Mr. Grogan?"

"No. No, nothing further, thank you, McLeary. This will do it if anything will, I suppose."

"Something amiss, Mr. Grogan?"

"Ah, nothing serious, you understand. Nasty little bit of a cold."

"Ah, yes. Too bad. There's an epidemic, so I understand."

That was conserving your sympathy, spreading it pretty thin. Mr. Grogan looked down at his glass to see how thick the bottom was. He wondered could McLeary be an Orangeman. Starting on another tack, he asked, "Where could everybody be this fine day?"

"Not here," McLeary observed sourly.

"What can it be do you suppose?"

McLeary shrugged; he was unable to imagine a counter-attraction so strong.

Grogan pushed away his bottle. "And I'll be having a beer to help that on its way if you please, McLeary." He was determined to stick it out until some friend came in. But he had had whiskey enough and more and he always did get a guilty feeling sitting empty-handed in a bar.

To go home again would have robbed the venture of all its worth. But he did not like to think of it as a venture. He would like to feel he could go home when he pleased, for after all he had done nothing unusual: got well, got up. No point to be proved to anybody. All too subtle for her however. She would get the idea he hadn't been able to stay on his feet any longer. She would have something there too, but his unsteadiness came from good healthy rye whiskey.

Grogan, a voice pulled him down by the ear, you're not feeling well and you know it. Naturally, he replied, I've been sick, what do you expect. You're sick and getting sicker. No, drunk and getting drunker. Mr. Grogan decided to take his stomach out for an airing. Would drop in later when some of his friends were sure to be there before going home to supper. McLeary would solemnly not let them out until Emmett Grogan had seen them.

It was fast getting dark and the night air settling down. Five steps Mr. Grogan took and sobered so suddenly it was like bumping into himself around a corner. Leafless trees, vacant graves, dry wells, books without bindings must feel the way Mr. Grogan suddenly felt then. He had better get home, he decided quickly. If he could make it, he added soon. With one block he was apprehensive, two and he was scared, three had him terrified. Something had him by the throat, no air was getting in, he was turning hot and cold, his joints were rusting fast. Holy Mary, Mother of God. Holy Mary,

I'm not ready. His mind cleared long enough to wish this on his wife: take her, Lord, she's mean.

Mr. Grogan lurched up the steps of his house and found the door locked. It wasn't possible. Could she have gone out, thinking he might collapse? He fumbled in all his pockets at once, could not find his key, tried them systematically. No key. He wanted just to slump down on those stones and die crying. Maybe the back door was open, if only he could hold out that long. When finally he shoved it in she was sipping tea at the kitchen table and looked up as if she were seeing a ghost. That was when he really got terrified. She was not shamming, probably never had been.

"Well, Mr. Big," she brogued, "I hope you enjoyed yourself."

"Oh," he managed to groan, leaning on the table edge, "sick." Terrible sick."

Mrs. Grogan drained her tea, picked a leaf off her tongue.

"Hah!" she snorted. "You? Grogan the Iron Man? You've never been sick a day in your life. Told me so yourself many a time."

"Oh, I'm dying, woman. You were right. I admit it. I'm a sick man. A dying man. I admit it. Do you hear? What more do you want for your pleasure?"

"Get on with you, Grogan. Sober up. I've no time to be bothered with you."

Mr. Grogan licked his lips. They were hot and crinkly. "Will you just help me up the steps a bit," he whispered.

"Now don't let me have to tell you again, get out of my kitchen and leave me to my business. You're well enough to swill with the pigs at McLeary's, you're well enough to bring me up a scuttle of coal from the cellar."

Mr. Grogan turned and dragged himself out in an agony of terror and pain. He crawled up the steps, pulling himself with rubbery hands and into his room. He struggled out of his overcoat and shoes, laid his cap on the table and crawled under the covers as the phone began ringing.

"Hello," she said. "Who? Oh, Mister Duffy, is it? Young Mister Duffy," and she raised her voice to a shout. "Well, yes, he was a little under the weather earlier in the day, one of the same old complaints. No, no we didn't. I always just look after him myself. Serious? Well, you ought to know Grogan well enough for that. Bring yourself out on a night like this? For what? Why, he's sitting at the kitchen table right now and was down at McLeary's the whole afternoon. I'm surprised you didn't see him."

STANLEY EDGAR HYMAN:

Notes on the Organic Unity of

John Peale Bishop

"Every poet over twenty-five must live with a critic. He must not go to bed with him."

John Peale Bishop, the poet responsible for that wicked aphorism, went to bed with a critic every night of his life. The simultaneous posthumous publication of Bishop's *Collected Poems* and *Collected Essays** gives us a remarkable opportunity to study the relationship between Bishop the poet and Bishop the critic. The volumes themselves are triumphs of painstaking and devoted editing by two of Bishop's friends, Allen Tate, who collected the poems and wrote a Preface and Memoir, and Edmund Wilson, who edited the essays with an Introduction. On a few points we might question them: Tate's decision not to attempt a complete edition, with variant readings and all the *juvenilia*; Wilson's printing of Bishop's piece on *Finnegans Wake* with "obvious errors corrected" in the text rather than in footnotes; the absence of any kind of index, even one of the poems by title; the absence in either volume of the good bibliography that the *Princeton University Library Chronicle* printed in February, 1946, or any bibliography. Yet all these seem outweighed by the simple excellence of both books and by our debt of gratitude to the editors.

Despite the wealth of related material in the volumes, it is possible here only to suggest an approach (based on a theory of organic and functional unity among the different forms of a man's writing which I have tried to sketch out in my chapter on Eliot in *The Armed Vision*) through hurried notes on a handful of themes in the criticism that seem significant in the poetry.

(1). *The irony of the South as Rome*. In his essay "The South and Tradition," Bishop suggests an approach to the South through the analogy of Rome. He writes:

* John Peale Bishop: *The Collected Poems*. Edited with a Preface and a Personal Memoir by Allen Tate. *The Collected Essays*. Edited with an Introduction by Edmund Wilson. Scribners.

So much would seem to be the fact of the Cavalier South. The myth is something else again; possibly it is more important. For when all is said and done, a myth is far more exciting to the mind than most discoveries of mere things. So long as Rome was a myth, a matter for the imagination, stirred only by a few battered columns and a dismantled Forum, Europe was able to produce an architecture from its forms, through three centuries incomparable for fecundity. But as soon as Pompeii and Herculaneum were unearthed, the facts of the Roman world uncovered, classical architecture died and in its place succeeded only the lifeless excellence of archeology.

Bishop's use of "myth" here will be discussed later. The important thing to note about this odd quotation is that when Bishop says "Rome," unlike almost any other writer, he does not mean the living city, the Catholic center, or the ancient civilization either flourishing or decayed. He means quite simply a place entirely dead and buried, which art can utilize only until it is dug up, when reality ends art's necessary illusion. This, with slight modification, is the view of the South he suggests for the Southern poet; that is, for himself. One of the best-known and most impressive of Bishop's poems, "The Return," dramatizing the destruction of a civilization apparently Roman through some sort of fated flood, would thus be a symbolic poem about the South (this conjecture is strengthened by another poem in *Now With His Love*, "Apparition," in which a Virginia forest is seen as "under-sea.") The ironic core of "The Return," the fact that the civilization at its height triumphed by means of the sea (the "old sea-fights") and is now swept away by the same sea or sea-god in rebellion ("Temples of Neptune invaded by the sea") is Bishop's metaphoric point about the South. The qualities that were its strength eventually destroyed it, the forces once successfully propitiated turned suddenly and devoured it.

This is, obviously, a sharply realistic, ironic picture, not at all the cozy "myth" Bishop pretends it to be. Where the fantasy of the South actually takes him in (as the racist nonsense "a mulatress; hence sensuous beyond either of its parents" does in the essays) we get such unsatisfactory poems about the South as the aimless relativism of "The Truth About the Dew," and the history vitiated by sentimentality of "Southern Pines." Only where he could see the South, not through a "myth," but through a viable metaphor, which seems consistently to have been Rome, do we get poems as fully achieved as "The Return" or the almost equally impressive "An Interlude," with its deeply poignant conclusion:

In the meantime, the barbarians are back in the passes.
Nothing is left but to stay devastation by tribute.

(2). *Poetry as discipline and technique.* "In criticism of the arts," Bishop writes in his essay "The Infanta's Ribbon," "the technical approach is often the most profitable." His display of it in the essay, in an analysis of the musicality in Verlaine's "Clair de Lune," both amazes us with the precision of his eye and ear, and impresses us with the formidability of a poetics based on that sensibility. A later essay, "The Discipline of Poetry," rejects the tradition of Whitman, Lawrence, and Sandburg as deficient in precisely this sense of craft, and quotes Baudelaire: "Any poet who does not know exactly what rhymes each word allows is incapable of expressing any idea whatever." Only from this discipline, Bishop says, does the poem get "intensity," which seems to be his key word. "What matters is intensity," he writes, "and with intensity the poem may survive anything — even archaic language." In a review in the *Collected Essays*, Bishop defines the poetic faculty informally as "that unpredictable vision which brings separated things together in a way that continues to move us and disturb us." He makes it clear, however, that "unpredictable" means just what it says, not either "irrational" or "uncontrolled," and in an essay on "Chainpoems and Surrealism" he is properly contemptuous of our modern forms of spirit-writing. "The unconscious," he notes, "so far as we have been allowed to perceive it in poetry, is not in itself very interesting."

Bishop's poetry, as we might expect, reflects this consciously classical approach as well as Bishop's superior ear, and shows a precision of technical effect rare in our time (Blake's "Minute Particulars" was a remarkably apt title for one of Bishop's volumes of verse). His imagery is of the most precise: in "And When the Net Was Unwound Venus Was Found Ravelled with Mars," a wartime afternoon liaison with an Italian harlot is prepared by such scenic personifications as a "together" bed and an "adulterous" dusk; in "October Tragedy," a French bourgeois seeking mushrooms, who stumbles on the body of a working girl murdered in a sex crime, had been out gathering "esculent rumps" (this last would be what Kenneth Burke calls a "Bellerophontic letter," the whole action foreshadowed *in petto*). Bishop's mastery of rhythm is equally great. Here is the last stanza of "Admonition":

Find the loveliest shroud you own,
Stilt a ceremonious

Height on gilded heels. Then summon
 To a rarity grown common
 Starved arachnid, the dead-louse
 And whatever feeds on bone.

The mockery of the loose trochaic rhythm, culminating in the shocking spondee of "dead-louse" in the penultimate line, and the final heavy line in irregular iambics, produces a stanza almost perfectly orchestrated. Bishop's resourcefulness in rhyme needs no more example than the lines in "Fiametta":

Her shadow restores the grass' green —
 Where the sun had gilded it;
 The air has given her copper hair
 The sanguine that was requisite.

where the delicate half-rhyme of "gilded it" and "requisite," combined with the chiming internal rhyme of "air" and "hair," produces a tonal supplement to Fiametta's elusive grace. Bishop's musical effects are of the most varied, from tiny diminishing and augmenting assonances and alliterations to such full chordal effects as the sequence of "breast," "waist," "beast," and "fresh" in the second stanza of "Metamorphosis of M" and the sharp jarring consonance of "parrot's irritable rage" in "Account of a Crime." Finally, Bishop's use of larger formal structures, mostly improvised, in the later poems is masterful, and the *alcaics*, *hendecasyllabics*, *rime riche* and the rest in the early poems show the amount of formal experimentation that went into them.

(3). *Myth and Ritual*. Bishop's criticism shows the curious paradox of a rich understanding of ritual and a thin and superficial conception of myth. In the essay "The Missing All," he notes that Hemingway, wounded and buried in a trench for four days during the war, "had been dead and brought to life again," and that he later found in the Spanish bull-fight "his own apprehension reduced to a ritual"; that is, in our terms, found a collective public rite in which he could merge his individual symbolic rite of reliving the experience. We are inevitably disappointed, then, when we see Bishop using "myth," in the essay "The Myth and Modern Literature" and elsewhere, not as the verbalization, slowly concretized, of this collective ritual experience, but as a kind of "romantic conceit," as in "the myth of the Old South"; in other words, a lie. It is this basic relationship of myth to ritual that Bishop misses in his otherwise excellent piece on *The Golden Bough*. Unable to comprehend Frazer's central point about religion, which is precisely that the truth of the myth lies in the reality of the ritual ex-

perience, he gets into a sterile debate over whether or not the book "attacks" Christianity. If, instead of kidding Jesse Weston's "rather nasty and doubtless pedantic interpretation of the real symbolism of the Lance and the Cup," Bishop had learned this relationship from her, had followed the transmutation of orgiastic rite into pretty legend, we would have been spared the one indubitably silly piece in the *Collected Essays*, the piece on "Sex Appeal in the Movies." Many of Bishop's critical problems stem precisely from his failure to relate myth to ritual: he is dissatisfied with the concept of American folk arts as "pretty bedquilts and quaint portraits painted by itinerant talent," but has no clearer idea of what is missing than that it is something "European"; he finds that Eudora Welty's *Robber Bridegroom* does not make us feel "that terror of the forest which is always present in the tale of Grimm," but cannot understand why; he talks of poetry as "incantation," but seems in practice to mean no more than prestidigitation.

In his poetry, inevitably, Bishop is strong where he stays close to the reality of the ritual experience, weak where he goes off into his disembodied myth. The poem that seems to be popularly taken as his best, "Speaking of Poetry," states a theory of poetry in terms of the necessity of a "ceremony" or ritual that "must be found":

Traditional, with all its symbols
ancient as the metaphors in dreams;
strange, with never before heard music; continuous
until the torches deaden at the bedroom door.

It is this ceremony that will wed the "Desdemona" of form to the "huge Moor" of content (or the members of any comparable poetic dichotomy), and the poem demonstrates its theory by being itself such a ritual, and encompassing the marriage with moving beauty. The other poems framed around the ritual experience tend to be successful, if not to the same degree: "Wish in the Daytime" records a rebirth rite; "And When the Net Was Unwound," making a fertility ceremony of a casual copulation, roots the myth of Mars and Venus in the reality of experience; "The Coming of Persephone" and "Narcissus," with imagery related to that of the Mars-Venus poem (the three make an odd triad) also base their myths in the sex experience. Bishop's poems on classic themes, with sexual and ritual elements heavily emphasized, tend to be among his best. When he experiments with Christian mythology, however, he has no comparable sense of an underlying ritual experience, and such poems as "Easter Morning"

and "The Emperor Also Was a God," both about the Crucifixion, fall into the sort of gossipy flatness that Robert Frost rewriting the Book of Job has made peculiarly his own.

(4). *Influence and Imitation*. For a heavily eclectic poet, Bishop had written curiously little in his prose on the relationship of a poet to his predecessors and contemporaries. In the essay "Homage to Hemingway," he discusses Hemingway's relationship to such "ancestors" and "masters" as Twain and Flaubert, Sherwood Anderson, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein, but the only generalization that emerges is "telling him what he must not do, for a young writer perhaps the most valuable aid he can receive." In an early review of Edgar Lee Masters, Bishop remarks that Masters' failure is due "to his determination to make poetry out of books which he has scarcely read." "It is not that fine poetry may not be created out of books and lonely meditation," he adds, but he gives no formula for this alchemy, other than that the poet who goes into the library for material must stay there "long enough."

Bishop's poetry reveals an enormous indebtedness. Merely to name a few of the more obvious influences, there are: Browning monologues ("Portrait of Mrs. C"); Cummings derivatives ("Riviera"); many Pound-influenced poems ("The Return" is the best of them); MacLeish imitations ("Occupation of a City"); a pseudo-Lindsay ("Mister Preval's Ball"); and any number of Yeats reminiscences (only "Hecuba's Rage" entirely comes off, but half a dozen others, among them "Young Men Dead," "A Defense," "Poor Tom's Song," "Divine Nativity," and "Whom the Gods Love" can stand comparison with a good deal of Yeats' work.) Sometimes the influence is a definite borrowing, probably unconscious, as where Eliot's two stanzas in "Whispers of Immortality" beginning "Donne, I suppose, was such another" and ending "Allayed the fever of the bone" boil down in Bishop's "John Donne's Statue" to:

Proud Donne was one did not believe
In heirs presumptive to a bone

and Webster's magnificent "Cover her face. Mine eyes dazzle. She died young" becomes the somewhat less magnificent

"Give me your hand. She was lovely. Mine eyes blind."

in Bishop's "Boudoir." In at least one case, the influence is consciously recognized and rejected in a parody, the marvelous burlesque of middle-period Pound in Bishop's "Frankie and Johnnie."

(5). *The Impossibility of Translating Poetry*. In a review entitled "On Translating Poets," Bishop confesses "I have spent some time, over a period of twenty years, trying to turn, now Latin lines, now lines written in some speech derived from the Latin, into an English that could be read without displeasure and without distrust." His conclusion is that it is impossible, that either you get a very different English poem or a useful "trot," but that either, for a number of reasons, is nevertheless worth doing. Bishop's own translations, printed as a section of the *Collected Poems*, seem to belie this: almost without exception they are impressive poems in their own right, and the few I have been able to check are unexpectedly faithful to the original. Bishop might be said to translate from six languages — Greek, Latin, Provençal, Spanish, French, and Arthur Rimbaud. His Rimbaud sonnet, "Venus Anadyomene," seems to me, along with some of Ben Belitt's work, the most impressive Rimbaud translation of our day. The other highpoint of the translations is a rendering of "Ieu M'Escondisc, Dompna, Que Mal Non Mier," from the Provençal of Bertran de Born, which seems to me, as an English poem, as good as Pound's Provençal translations (I have no way of knowing whether it is as free). In his review, Bishop justifies translation as an exercise, as a way for the poet to "keep his pencil sharp" and "keep the hand in." His own work suggests that in addition translation sharpens the poet's skill in his original work and adds to his technical resources, and may also, apparently to Bishop's surprise, produce new poems of beauty and distinction.

(6). *Tragedy and the Tragic Sense of Life*. Bishop believes that "the tragic sense of life" is possible, at least to Spaniards, particularly to Hemingway's bullfighters (it would be interesting to see what Unamuno would make of *that*). Tragedy in the traditional sense, however, is now impossible. Bishop writes in "Moll Flanders' Way":

It is precisely the greatness of the novel that it has been able to do this: that, in circumstances so small that they have lost the potentiality of tragedy, it has been able to find tragic possibilities, not in what was done, but in the failure of accomplishment. . . .

Our substitute for tragedy is what Bishop calls "dramatic irony," and the chief dramatic irony, for Bishop, seems to be the physical reality of death. The modern world is like Trimalchio's Sybil, he says in one place: it wants to die, but death is not the tidy abstraction it thinks. Bishop writes, in "The Poems and Prose of E. E. Cummings":

The armies and the governments of this world had ignored the lonely man; but death had not ignored him. It was only to the individual that death paid any attention. It was this contrast between the death of a man — I have seen them dug up out of the earth of France at Montfaucon — this death known in the flesh that lives and rots, and the impersonal casualty lists put out by the governments that gave everyone who went through the War a permanent distrust and horror of abstract forms of information.

The sharpest irony is the relationship of life at its most vigorous, sex, to death; that is: love and war, Venus and Mars, or the Chaucer lines from which Bishop got the title of his second volume of verse:

What is this world? What asketh man to have?
Now with his love, now in his colde grave
Allone, with-outen any companye.

A central image of Bishop's poetry is the corpse's corruption, the rotting of what was once young and lovely, or powerful and vigorous; whether the girl of "Admonition" with the dead-louse, the old king of "Night" "hideously exhumed and set upon his warhorse," the "young men rotted" of "In the Dordogne," or the girl with "the face rotten" and the drawers "maculate with blood" among the mushrooms in "October Tragedy." We thus have a sequence, in Bishop's thought, from tragedy, to the tragic sense of life, to dramatic irony, to death and sex, to the corruption of the flesh, and the only possible tragedy for us would have to run that gamut, and end as the consciousness of worm and rot, seeing the skull beneath the skin. It is this limitation, I think, that deprives Bishop's poetry of a final dimension. A typical example is his poem "Twelfth Night," which, being about the journey of the Magi, suggests comparison with the Eliot poem of that title. The comparative failure of this poem, as against Eliot's, might have been discussed above in connection with Bishop's inadequate sense of sacrificial ritual underlying the Christian mythology, but the essential difference seems to me to be that Eliot succeeds in making the experience tragic where Bishop does not. Eliot's poem ends:

We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

Bishop's ends:

But gray evasions shamed their skeptic eyes
And the starved hands were suddenly boned with cold
As plucking their gorgeous skirts they shook to go.

Eliot's Magi are dying that life may be born (that the crops may sprout out of their corpses, in fact), and the experience is tragic; Bishop's will die disappointed at seeing, not a god, "but a small child petulant with cries," and the experience is only ironic and pathetic.

(7). *Poetry and Criticism*. Bishop's metaphor for criticism, in his essays, is the mutilation of a living thing. "Decorticate a stem," he writes in "The Infanta's Ribbon," "split it into its fibres — it can no longer bear a flower. We cannot with the knife reveal its life; we can but sever it." And yet, he adds, the dissection may tell us something, and seems worth doing. His own criticism, or surgical equipment for dissection, progressed from a review of Pound's first Cantos in 1922, which confesses "I shall have to learn at least three more languages and read seven years before I shall pretend to recognize all the references," to the piece on "*Finnegans Wake*," published in 1940 and revised near the end of his life, which analyzes a key episode, that of the "prankquean," with an industry, learning and imagination that make it, along with William Troy's work, the best criticism of that difficult book we have. Yet Bishop was always torn between an attraction toward criticism and a fear of its cutting edge, and some of his aphorisms in the *Collected Essays* are as short and brutal as "Critics are dissectors and scavengers." Nevertheless, not only is his criticism a body of valid creative art, but many of his poems are as much criticism as poetry. "An English Lady" is a critical evaluation, cruelly satiric, of a Baedeker approach to art; "The Hours," the long memorial poem to F. Scott Fitzgerald, is an interpretation of Fitzgerald's life and work by way of a tribute; "The Spare Quilt" is, like "Speaking of Poetry," a metaphoric poetics; "Meaning of a Lion" is an allegory on criticism and the artist; and two short previously unpublished poems, "To a Critic" and "This Critic" are in fact remote enough from primary art to be what Marx and Engels subtitled *The Holy Family*, a criticism of critical criticism.

(8). *Poetry and Painting*. Bishop's essays constantly relate poetry to the plastic arts. A lecture entitled "Poetry and Painting," read at Princeton in 1940, sets out to demolish the distinction Lessing so laboriously erected in *Laocöon*, and to grant painting a dimension of time and poetry a dimension of space (it does not quite succeed, in my opinion). In it Bishop quotes Allen Tate's charge that "in some of my poems I lean very far toward the painters," and admits it with no qualms. Analogies with painting are constant in his criticism, par-

ticularly with Picasso's work in *papier collé*, which he uses for work as disparate as Cummings' poems and Masefield's narratives. Picasso's collage is obsessive with him, in fact, and at least three times in the *Collected Essays* Bishop refers to what seems to be its key image for him, the fact that in it Picasso utilized "scraps of wallpaper from demolished houses." In his prose, Bishop uses something of a collage technique (his poetry, compared to Pound's and Eliot's, notably does not) and some of his visual descriptions, like a fine one of Harry Lehr looking like "a Gibson man carved out of a potato," are pure paste-ups.

As Tate suggests, many of Bishop's poems lean toward the pictorial. The best of these, "Perspectives are Precipices," converts the Bluebeard tale into an ominous Dali-like vista disappearing into the horizon (a comparison that would be offensive, if Bishop's criticism did not show enormous respect for that talented charlatan). Several other poems are simply descriptions of pictures: "A Recollection" of a picture of a Venetian courtesan he either saw in his childhood or invented for an earlier fiction piece, "How Brakespeare Fell in Love With a Lady Who Had Been Dead Some Time"; "A Frieze" of a real or imaginery frieze; "Paolo Uccello's Battle Horses . . ." of a Uccello picture he also discusses in "Poetry and Painting." Still others are done in the styles of painters: "Ode" in Picasso's, "Riviera" in the style of satiric dry-point etching like Peggy Bacon's, etc.

(9). *Art and Society*. Bishop is concerned with the social relations of art only in the most neutral or reportorial sense. "What conditions are necessary," he asks in "The Myth and Modern Literature," "that a body of literature come into being in a country, in a region, which hitherto has had little or none that was of more than local interest?" He is concerned with art and social classes in this same neutral sense, and his essay "Manet and the Middle Class" explores Manet's relationship to the social currents of his time in quite dispassionate detail. Bishop praises and quotes Marx, as an economic observer, half a dozen times in the essays, distinguishing between this "great and often profound thinker" and his absurd "disciples." What Bishop scorns, and seems to have scorned consistently from his early work to his latest, through the thirties as through the twenties, is political and social *commitment* in the artist, that aspect of Marx and Marxism, for example, that is *not* neutral social science. The *Collected Essays* include a furious letter to *The New Republic* in 1933, "The Social Muse Once

More," appealing to poets to flee politics, "the besetting sin of poets and one which has done them and their craft more harm than all forms of drunkenness and debauchery put together." All such artistic commitment, Bishop insists, results in didacticism or false art, which he distinguished from true art in "Moll Flanders' Way":

Like all the great novelists who were to follow him, Defoe both partakes of the middle-class view of conduct and surpasses it. And he opposes it in the only way that is open to the artist to oppose any set of abstract principles: not, as our proletarian novelists would do, by offering in their stead another, and supposedly better, set of abstract principles, but by confronting them with the passions of life and the consequences of action.

In another place, discussing Vardis Fisher, Bishop redefines this dichotomy: "We ask of the novel that it give us, not the illusion of real life, but the reality of the imagination." In still another place, quite seriously, he announces Baudelaire as the poet of "the common man."

Bishop's poetry somewhat shatters this neat illusion of the artist as a truncated man, a neutral observer on a plane above mortal strife. When he opposes the values of life and sex to those of war and death in "And When the Net Was Unwound" and similar poems, Bishop is clearly using poetry to propagandize against war, and producing not didacticism but art. When, on the other hand, he ruins the poem "Night and Day" with the final lines.

And the end what?
More speed, more hunger.

the poem is bad, not because it is didactic, or because Bishop is committed against speed and hunger, but because the lines are flat, inadequately fused into poetry, and irrelevant. Bishop's poems against didacticism inevitably fall into counter-didacticism, like "Harder It Is to Sing":

Harder it is to sing than shout
And rotten, rotten is the age.
But what are all these poets about,
Their throats constricted by their rage?

"Art and Action," an elaborate complaint against the demands that the poet take a political position, gets its strongest effect, not from the satiric phrasing, but by running sixteen lines on two rhymes, and playing the tradition of its elaborate formalism against its content. Where Bishop is most successful, in fact, is in his poems like "This

Dim and Ptolemaic Man" that furnish a counter-perspective to the social (in this case, the universal, with the last stanza suddenly projecting the farmer in his rattly Ford against the movement of the spheres, as Eliot before him did with Sweeney).

(10). *The Figure of the Artist*. Bishop's two heroic figures in the essays are Yeats, who said "I could recover if I shrieked my heart's agony" yet remained dumb "from human dignity"; and Joyce, who dedicated his life to "an exploration into the unknown." The figure of the artist, proud as Yeats and priestly as Joyce, is a thread that runs all through the prose, but the artist of the poetry is a much more ambiguous figure. He is not only the "mighty" lion in "Meaning of a Lion" finally eaten by jackals; he is the comic lover in "To His Late Mistress" who begins as Fortinbras and is corroded into Hamlet; he is the dying old grandfather who kept peacocks "When other reasons for pride were gone"; he is the Roman Senator in "No More the Senator" putting off his insignia of office and going into a monastery cell because "multiplying manuscripts" will save those whom Christ cannot; he is the youngest hunter in "Your Chase Had a Beast in View" who sings with erotic delight as the leopards are slaughtered; he is even Poor Tom, who sings:

Alas, to make music I must withdraw
 Into a fool's experience.
 Only when hair's pranked mad with straw
 Do my words make sense.

As these notes suggest, Bishop is a rather more complex figure than we have tended to assume. If he is not a deep thinker, his criticism shows as sound a mind and taste as any we have had in our time. If he is not a major poet (and despite Eliot, we still have no idea how to tell major from minor, nor in fact whether the terms mean anything), he is one of a half-dozen lyric poets in America in our century (Stevens, Marianne Moore, Cummings, Aiken, Ransom come to mind) who without a "great" or large-scale work, have produced a body of poems that seems assured of survival. Bishop's criticism and poetry are substantially of a piece, the complementary work of a man imaginative, passionate, sensitive, dedicated to art, and deeply humanistic. Each reinforces the other, and both together, in these fine editions, show us the depth of our loss at John Peale Bishop's untimely death.

LEONARD CASPER:

Phallic Symbol

Swim, fin-warm, windward from gray-shadowed shores;
 Keening grief of greencool shallows ignore
 For swells beyond the bay where sea gulls call
 A sundance. Seek the wildest wave and s p r a w l.
 Life's end achieved: the fish egg fertile where
 The reproductive act begot it, there
 Along the silent banks of inland streams.
 AH! 'TIS LOVE ALONE . . .

The cormorant screams

His quick delight, quivering in the clouds,
 Alert to kill. (The sound of sunlight loud
 Above the blackened clamor of the deep.)
 Disdain the water's weight. Rejoicing, leap,
 Brancusi-like, straight at the staring eye.
 Then fall, content, belly spiting the sky:
 Dead. Far out, limply flow beyond the reach
 Of tides: (the lemmings loathe a cluttered beach).
 UTILITY IS TRUTH: TRUTH UTILITY.
 Sail on, stalwart, like sewage to the sea.

The Horizon Right Over There As Seen from Here by an Unwary Spectator at Seaside

As he awakes with laughter from a dream,
 Twin pale dimensions sandwich him between,
 Brazenly embarrassing. Tensile gleams
 Of space on gravitated lines careen
 About the circle of his sensate eye,
 Prehensile as a fly.
 Heat-stifled, dissipated motes of air,
 Begrudging, stir up silence with a sigh
 While stroboscopic bluffs of water stare

(Like figureheads engraved upon a wind,
 High-browed and many-chinned).
 Trees fall and reascend across his sight,
 Inviting birds, that nestle on his lids,
 To peer among the pigment pyramids
 And curved lensatic cones that let in light.
 Midway from bright to night,
 He moans with pleasure, restless-rolling then
 As he from laughter with a dream is lost again.

HYMAN SWETZOFF:

A Long Journey and a Fatal Bridge

Sometimes when my legs form
 the angle of the steps and perform
 sympathetic magic to go in
 and it is night,

the house becomes round,
 the windows throw
 their reflections out
 from the daggers someone
 threw from a distance,
 and the doorway
 in its light and black
 makes so keen a line,
 I turn not knowing which way
 I'll be cut, not wishing to be, afraid
 that this is the murderer, and, if not,
 afraid he will come again.

The One who lives in my house above comes
 and stands the facade of a moment,
 and, — before I can gesture the horror
 or cry the warning — it happens to him. He falls split,

not along the side but from the top down to the center
to fall, one part lying here

reminding me of some fathers I know
one part there

reminding me of children rolling on the grass
down an incline quicker and quicker
until one half child becomes the other
half adult to be.

Some things have happened in my dreams
when the change in the landscape is a music sound,
an echo of abysses that begins with the eyes
and then leaps as far out as in to become
a question that carries no time to the mind.

For the two pieces come together and disappear alone.

I never saw the One again but I heard him.

His noise, curved bite in the linoleum floor, the spider falling through to hover before the illuminated eyes, the centipedes, the nights, higher than dust, the beetle, pregnant, giving up its young, hypnotized by a sound creeping through a crack and suddenly becoming death, the cry of the cat cornerless in the hall.

This is what I see as I go,
but is it the wrong direction?
This is what I hear when I am still.

EDWIN MORGAN:

A Warning of Waters at Evening

What river-growl appals my flesh?
 Night shakes the hounded streams with fear.
 What waters roaring plunge, burst, crash
 This chafed and shuddering weir?

Fog has hulled the fruited oak
 Whose leaves and galls fly in the foam;
 Twigs scatter like a starling-flock
 Down to their howling home.

Dense as hidden Eden's cloud,
 Black as the ravished mine of gold,
 Such air refells the dancing blood
 Back to blindness and cold.

I see neither tree nor wave;
 The dark is full of tongues that bay
 Their breathing and invisible drove
 Along the glades of prey.

The hunt is neither pack nor fox.
 The kill is in the seething firth.
 I hear the bell upon the rocks
 Where the sea fills the earth:

Swinging in the booming main,
 Streaming with the tears of hail,
 Singing like the all-damned man
 That cries through fire's vale.

What sparkling mountain-spring was there?
 The birth of snow and sun is ended.
 All feeds the welter of the shore,
 To rain-dark gulf descended.

I fear that tempest and that night,
 I fear this river at my feet.
 I fear the bitter salt far out
 Where sin and wrath must meet.

ELLEN TIFFT:

The Tall Well

I

It is as if.
 Exactly.
 As if there were a tall well
 like aunt lucy's popping
 up in dreams with the
 hundreds of fast eating rabbits

as if there were a tall well

and whenever
 a hint say of
 a corner of leaves
 leaning outward
 flat on their backs on the sky

as if at the mention
 there were a tall well
 hardly real at all
 but yes tremendous
 and just touch the handle
 rolls up water
 for the cold wet cup.

II

Sometimes the night.
 An evening with the marx brothers
 laughing at the inefficient fiend

behind the family picture old stephen
 the card with his hands
 spread-eagled from his ears absolutely no

this thing is not real
 does not exist

but a catch in the music switched keys
 at the wrong time if there
 had been an announcement lights
 switched on off a curtain
 rose or the world slipped three feet
 on the axis but suddenly
 the half-boogie beat
 and the feeling that love —

III

is the answer
 the tip to the universe, beyond
 all the complex systems
 the password to the transparent room.

IV

Shaking
 anytime
 day
 night
 the framework to dust
 and the dust into clay
 eyes nose mouth

the terrible
 lunge leap drive
 deny it

find it where you will.
 As if.
 Exactly.
 THE TALL WELL.

VERNON YOUNG:

Hollywood: Lost Moments

The most subtle problem of movie-making is the adequate translation of literary form, particularly that of the novel, into the continuity peculiar to sound-and-reflected-image. Obviously, where the literary work is least dependent on the corollaries of physical incident and sensuous perception, the metamorphosis is most difficult, so difficult that it is usually bypassed in favor of a less abstruse objective. Walter Wanger's recent rape of Henry James' novelette, *The Aspern Papers*, is a mystifying case in point. Originally, a studio reader must have been enchanted by the situation created in the novel and, finding it simple to recount as a plot, recitable by episodes and confirmed in a specified, related milieu, approved it for movie consideration. Venice, with all its historical and exotic connotations, a romantically visual background for the devious strategies of the narrator, hunting for Jeffrey Aspern's love-letters; the old Juliana Bordereau, living in her memories of the past that she had shared with Aspern, one of the world's great poets; the spinster niece, drawn into the shades with her but yearning for the sun: there is nothing here that could not be captured by the over-hearing sound-track and the overseeing camera — nothing but, of course, the tone. And it was, perhaps, their acknowledgement of this presence that turned the story department's blood to water and panicked them into abandoning the whole beautiful venture for an excursion into grotesque bathos to which they gave the boomerang title, *The Lost Moment*.

Certainly this challenge from good fiction, especially of the order mastered by James, must present the largest hazard to the tricksters of the photoplay. To distill from the given circumstances of a story the tone beyond and around the margins is a task demanding artistry equal, in another part of the forest, to the genius of the original author. In the novels of James, above all, one finds this signature of the elusive, a quality that circumvents and surpasses the explicit so that, in the totality, the plot, itself always of sure design, instead of subordinating the textures as if they were mere lovely accretions, luxuries, so to speak, outside of the central statements, is on

the contrary subdued among, almost ancillary to them. The nuances, the interlinear game of implications, insights registered through the inner ear, apprehensions felt without resort to images fixed by the retina — these are the inherently literary gifts of James. Subtract these from any of his longer novels between *The Awkward Age* and *The Ivory Tower*, for example, novels which otherwise have perfectly coherent moral and social problems in their plot structures, and what will you have left? Not a working script for the movies! The entire halo of allusion and atmosphere would have to be reconstructed again, in terms foreign to the initial inspiration.

I had thought that these characteristics also belonged to *The Aspern Papers*, making it an artistic liability for the Hollywood approach. On re-reading it, however, I found that its suggestiveness, although potent, remains well outside of the usable content. This is to say that everything needful for dramatization is stated in action, and everything in the novel is contained within that action, in the form of narrative, dialogue or soliloquized resolution. Every decision has a supplementary outcome in action, every incident has a developed climax. Unlike the majority of James' novels, *The Aspern Papers* is amenable to judicious theatrical translation. There is hardly a paragraph in it unassimilable by the agency of scene. The private reflections of the narrator can everywhere be rearranged as overt discourse, if necessary, and James has even supplied Mrs. Prest as a plausible confidante should the exigencies of development require her further. The dialogue is not only, needless to say, superior in expression to any likely to be composed by a movie writer, but also sufficiently vivid and economical in its presentation to obviate "functional" rewriting. Furthermore, it is edited to the hilt with cues for facial mobility, as in the following encounter between the narrator and Miss Bordereau.

"Are your rooms too dear? if they are you can have more for the same money," Juliana responded. "We can arrange, we can *combinare*, as they say here."

"Well yes, since you ask me, they're too dear, much too dear," I said. "Evidently you suppose me richer than I am."

She looked at me as from the mouth of her cave. "If you write books don't you sell them?"

"Do you mean don't people buy them? A little, a very little — not so much as I could wish. Writing books, unless one be a great genius — and even then! — is the last road to fortune. I think there's no more money to be made by good letters."

"Perhaps you don't choose nice subjects. What do you write about?" Miss Bordereau implacably pursued.

"About the books of other people. I'm a critic, a commentator, an historian, in a small way." I wondered what she was coming to.

"And what other people now?"

"Oh better ones than myself: the great writers mainly — the great philosophers and poets of the past; those who are dead and gone and can't, poor darlings, speak for themselves."

"And what do you say about them?"

"I say they sometimes attached themselves to very clever women!" I replied as for pleasantness But she didn't take what I had said as a confession; she only asked:

"Do you think it's right to rake up the past?"

"I don't feel that I know what you mean by raking it up. How can we get at it unless we dig a little? The present has such a rough way of treading it down."

"Oh I like the past, but I don't like critics," my hostess declared with her hard placidity.

"Neither do I, but I like their discoveries."

"Aren't they mostly lies?"

"The lies are what they sometimes discover," I said, smiling at the quiet impertinence of this. "They often lay bare the truth."

"The truth is God's, it isn't man's: we had better leave it alone. Who can judge of it? — who can say?"

"We're terribly in the dark, I know," I admitted: "but if we give up trying what becomes of all the fine things? What becomes of the work I just mentioned, that of the great philosophers and poets? It's all vain words if there's nothing to measure it by."

"You talk as if you were a tailor," said Miss Bordereau whimsically;

This exchange, among others in *The Aspern Papers*, has a naked play of interlocking wit, a pictorial emphasis and consistency of metaphor that ensures appropriateness for dramatic treatment, whereas in the denser novels of James the dialogue, itself, may have force as intellectual content but may not be induced to serve as outwardly dramatic progression.

The failure of whoever adapted this novelette to the base purposes it served on the screen is deplorable; it is a unique opportunity lost. I can think of only two other novels by James which might be committed to the movies without necessarily losing their integrity: *The American* and *The Europeans* — although I understand that *The Turn of the Screw* is being attempted. It is unlikely for any of these to get solicitous attention if the intellectual nimbleness of *The Aspern Papers* was considered so poor a risk that it was sacrificed to the hideous vulgarity of *The Lost Moment*, in which Miss Tina was

given a split personality (and the pianistic ability of Alfred Cortot!) and Agnes Moorhead as Juliana Bordereau, made up to suggest Oldest Resident of Shangri-La, turned out to be the murderer of Jeffrey Aspern and set fire to herself — and to the effigy of James — in the last reel!

II

It should be no surprise to us by now that the drones in the hive of Hollywood invade the purlicus of literature with the buzzing, bumbling tactics of winged Goths but since there have recently been some extremely pertinent samples of acidulous social realism it is shocking to find even the cruder sort of psychological 'inscape' still neglected or plundered of its essence. A good test case for transfusion of a not overwhelmingly literary subject was *The Lost Weekend*. Perhaps now that the hue and cry over both the novel and the film has subsided it may be possible to discuss them in cooler air. Here was a novel in which the predicament was essentially psychic, where, although the milieu of houses, bars, streets and so forth was concretely present, the drama took place in the hero's mind. When he explained himself, it was to himself, not to another, and, in the novel, it was precisely these explanations, self-arguments, cynical and circular debates for self-aggrandizement that made Don Birnam interesting. His mind had content; his rationalizations had humor and literary flourish. That was the secret of his charm. The sharpness of his candor and the shrewdness of his irony sustained one's interest in him and prevented him, as a mind — apart from his terrifying physical experience — from being merely pathetic.

To transfer Birnam's plight to the screen, with its horror, bravado, indignity and ambiguity, should have been a comparatively simple achievement. Even Birnam's fantasies were dramatic projections and there was little to be lost from his secret attitudes towards which the reader was in the know; they all lent themselves easily enough to the art of a reasonably good mime. But the movie was, in my opinion, a totally inadequate version of the book, for two reasons: a deliberate evasion of Birnam's psychiatric complexity — insured by the superficial histrionics of Ray Milland, one of the laziest actors in Hollywood — and, consequently, a conventionally indifferent technical approach. Ends and means are co-determinate in the movies as in any art; once it was decided that the real sources and issues of Birnam's anxiety were to be scrapped as dangerous and the semi-

comic adventures of a drunk were to be substituted, any but the most orthodox methods of filming were irrelevant.

Technically, all the meager innovations that the picture had to boast were the "authentic" shots of Third Avenue, the siren voices of the liquor bottles, the actualizing of the bat-and-the-mouse in the *delirium tremens* sequence and the adventitious fantasy in which dozens of overcoats with quarts in their pockets swayed temptingly on the stage at the opera, a conceit far below the quality of Charles Jackson's originals. The novel was pregnant with opportunities for the introduction of camera virtuosity, not for its own sake but for correlation with Birnam's shifts of focus. A dipsomaniac, and notably Jackson's definitive member of the genus, does not see the world as others see it, nor himself as others see him. It is a pity that the director of the picture had not anticipated Robert Montgomery's canny use of camera-as-protagonist in *The Lady in the Lake*. Instead, a commonplace method followed a commonplace interpretation. Failing to assess the labyrinthine nature of Birnam's vicious circle, the producers of *The Lost Weekend* pre-empted their chances for an independent contribution to film art.

Graham Greene's novels offer almost perfect conditions for movie transcription; in them violent action and themes of social impact are interwoven with theatrical neatness. The reflections of Greene's introverted heroes invariably attach themselves to the world of sensory detail. The climaxes are rarely staged in the mind alone; what R. L. Stevenson called "the brute quality of incident" resolves the problem. This insistent reliance on literal terror, while it depreciates the seriousness of Greene's fiction, guarantees its availability for movie plotting. And along with its background of political intrigue it includes more precise shadings of the moral question than the equally incident-laden fiction of, say, Eric Ambler or Dashiell Hammet. Even with these advantages, Greene's novels have been maltreated as badly as those of loftier writers, and for the same reason, fear of confronting the controlling principle. *The Ministry of Fear* was butchered to make a Hollywood holiday and again the insouciant Mr. Milland was counted on to pull the punches in characterization. *The Labyrinthine Ways*, recently reprinted as *The Power and the Glory*, is now going the movie rounds under a third title, as deflated as the new content, *The Fugitive*. John Ford, who directed it, must have felt encircled by the Catholic hydra, for what could have been a searching study of spiritual ambivalence and physical vacillation in a hunted

Mexican priest has been converted into a harmless idyll of gentle heroism, its casuistry ironed flat for the solace of the faithful. Ford was obviously reluctant to give up his Mexico scenery, but why it was necessary for him to desert an intelligible dramatic dilemma rather than ruin a less powerfully critical thesis is another one of those unexplained dishonesties of the Hollywood conscience.

About two years ago, Herman Shumlin addressed himself to the possibilities of a Graham Greene scenario and justified them from every angle of approach. *The Confidential Agent* was one of the most faithful adaptations of a good novel to reach the screen, faithful not simply in adherence to plot but equally in provision for motivations. It owed its freedom of artistic expression to Shumlin's refusal to anticipate hypothetical offenses taken by pressure groups. The picture offered no new departure in techniques of the art; it was simply a thoroughly honest job of abiding by a novelist's intention with regard to his story, his point of view and his kinetic mannerisms of style. The refugee no-man's-land inhabited by Greene's Spanish Loyalist hero and the stifling complacency of British upper-class chauvinism were as candidly rendered by Boyer's modestly unheroic acting and Shumlin's directorial integrity as they had been mordantly portrayed in the novel. The movie was not, I believe, a cash success, yet *The Lost Weekend*, which was circulating (or should I say floating?) at the same time, was a hit of large dimensions. The intellectuals considered it "courageous" and the uninitiated were satisfied that the celluloid simulacrum of Birnam reformed himself. My point in making this comparison is that the "thriller" aspects of *The Confidential Agent* should have engaged the emotions (I speak in hyperbole) of the general public, while its subtler treatment of moral isolation should have flattered the critical minority. But it appears to have been caviare to the particular as well as to the general, disappointed alike, it may be, at seeing Charles Boyer and Lauren Bacall together without benefit of concupiscence. (As in the book, the suggestion of psychic impotence in the hero was unmistakable.) Deprived of their anticipated *jeu d'amour*, the audiences saw nothing else worth considering; if one were not aware of the underlying reason, one would have thought the American moviegoer had very high standards indeed to accept casually, as if they saw duplications of them every day, such performances as those given by Katina Paxinou, Peter Lorre, George Colouris, Wanda Hendrix and Mr. Boyer, himself. Without ballyhooed assurance that it was a daring movie — it was far more

daring and infinitely more competent than *Gentleman's Agreement* — *The Confidential Agent*, bearing its virtues of candor, excitement and penetration, was ignored. (For the purpose of my subject I have assumed that only skill and clear intentions are needed to create good movies, an ingenuous assumption that saves me from embarking on the subject of audience appeal, the credit system, our culture pattern and other entangling alliances. Since this is not an article on the sociology of the movies, it cannot pursue such ramifications.)

III

I sometimes believe that a movie is most effective, everything else being equal, when its fictional point of departure has not been too fully prepared, as with a good short story, capable of extension, (like "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" and "The Killers" which, considering the attendant dangers, became quite meritorious movies) or a bad novel, where nothing can be lost and everything, to the recreative eye, can be gained, everything that was never there but could be in a different mode. Henry James, in his preface to *The Aspern Papers*, invokes "that odd law which somehow always makes the minimum of valid suggestion serve the man of imagination better than the maximum. The historian, essentially, wants more documents than he can really use; the dramatist only wants more liberties than he can really take." The dramatic executors of *The Lost Moment* patently took more liberties than they should have really wanted! The minimum of valid suggestion served men of imagination, though on a vastly more popular plane than James had reference to, in not a few movies of the last year. Notably, *Cross Fire* and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* were both, for the most part, triumphant over their original material.

The most arresting illustration of much-from-little was Sam Wood's production of *Ivy*, so visibly moving in photographic and dramatic excellence that one could have believed its model to have been profound. The model, in this case, was a crime-of-passion hack story by Marie Belloc-Lowndes, a soul-mate of Robert Hichens, who,

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a generation ago, made a lucrative living from thrillers with a certain psychological *frisson*, customarily dealing with the wages of adultery. *The Story of Ivy* was one such, and its extraordinary merit as a movie can be credited to the collusion of the director, Sam Wood, with the cameramen, Russel Metty and David Horsley, and the writer, Charles Bennet; together, on a minimum and stark basis of hackneyed plot, they shaped a formalized wonder, enforced at every transition and climax by breathlessly lighted photography and a cogent musical score arranged by David Tamkin.

The thematic *raison d'être* of the picture was strung on a continuity of literal black-and-white symbolism. If this sounds like an idiotic tautology, since movies, except when they're in Technicolor, *are* black and white, I can only affirm my bafflement and maintain that the values were so carefully handled by the modulations of light that certain objects seemed very definitely black or white in contrast with other tones suggesting a variety of possibilities outside this range. In one sequence the effect of crescendo was thrillingly pronounced as the camera cut from a black bag containing the crystals with which Ivy was poisoning her husband to a black feathered hat in a shop-window being admired by Ivy in the foreground, carrying a white parasol, dissolving to a top hat on the table at Ivy's home, announcing an unwelcome visitor, past which Ivy nervously walked, drawing off her white gloves. Sounding glib in summary, the chronology was conducted with meticulous fluidity, and I may say that I saw the picture three times before catching its manifold and lucid contrivances of mood and movement. Added to these elements of craft were handsome performances, an economy of character exposition, a leisurely but integrated pace and a tactful operation by the genie of the cutting-room. By starting from their own set of symbolic ar-

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rangements and replacing second-rate prose continuity by first-rate visual imagery, Woods and his collaborators transcended the tawdry original, gave it dignity, seriousness and a kind of nobly spatial meaning. In so doing, they were pursuing an emancipation of means certainly not new to the movies; their success was due to the exceedingly sophisticated result they obtained from their synthesis. Now that the movies of 1947 have been speeded to oblivion by the Academy's kiss of death (the usual awards made to the most undistinguished picture as well as to the most undistinguished acting of the year), with those of 1948 soon to follow, I rise to protest that among the too-many films I have seen *Ivy* was the most technically proficient of the 1947 releases and one of the purest examples of the movie art I have seen in years spent on the dark and popcorn-strewn aisle.

With a half-dozen writers and directors in Hollywood interested in greater scope for subject matter and hundreds of technicians to meet any production problem devised, there is really no limitation *within* their craft that cannot be assaulted. Through whatever accidents of enterprise or tenacity of aspiration, capably made movies do come our way and give evidence of battles fought and sometimes won over the recalcitrant nexus of form and content. Under the present sequacious dispensation, it may be fifty years before Hollywood can give us commensurable adaptations of *Moby Dick*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *A Passage to India*, but it is not wanting in taste and craftsmanship requisite for filming *The Return of the Native* or *Lord Jim*. Dare we hope? At present, Hollywood has at least developed its own brand of dramatic revelation. Better that it should redeem bad fiction by its natively won methods of rehabilitation than insult good fiction and its own talents by false concession to areas beyond its comprehension and control.

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